

## BLAINVILLE'S BEAKED WHALE (*Mesoplodon densirostris*): Northern Gulf of Mexico Stock

### STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

Three species of *Mesoplodon* are known to occur in the Gulf of Mexico, based on stranding or sighting data (Hansen *et al.* 1995; Würsig *et al.* 2000). These are Blainville's beaked whale (*M. densirostris*), Gervais' beaked whale (*M. europaeus*) and Sowerby's beaked whale (*M. bidens*). Sowerby's beaked whale in the Gulf of Mexico is considered extralimital because there is only 1 known stranding of this species (Bonde and O'Shea 1989) and because it normally occurs in northern temperate waters of the North Atlantic (Mead 1989). Identification of *Mesoplodon* to species in the Gulf of Mexico is very difficult, and in many cases, *Mesoplodon* and Cuvier's beaked whale (*Ziphius cavirostris*) cannot be distinguished; therefore, sightings of beaked whales (Family Ziphiidae) are identified as *Mesoplodon* sp., Cuvier's beaked whale, or unidentified Ziphiidae.

Blainville's beaked whales appear to be widely but sparsely distributed in temperate and tropical waters of the world's oceans (Leatherwood *et al.* 1976; Leatherwood and Reeves 1983). Strandings have occurred along the northwestern Atlantic coast from Florida to Nova Scotia (Schmidly 1981), and there have been 4 documented strandings and 2 sightings of this species in the northern Gulf of Mexico (Hansen *et al.* 1995; Würsig *et al.* 2000). Beaked whales were seen in all seasons during GulfCet aerial surveys of the northern Gulf of Mexico from 1992 to 1998 (Hansen *et al.* 1996; Mullin and Hoggard 2000). The Gulf of Mexico population is provisionally being considered a separate stock for management purposes, although there is currently no information to differentiate this stock from the Atlantic Ocean stock(s). Additional morphological, genetic and/or behavioral data are needed to provide further information on stock delineation.

### POPULATION SIZE

Estimates of abundance were derived through the application of distance sampling analysis (Buckland *et al.* 2001) and the computer program DISTANCE (Thomas *et al.* 1998) to sighting data. From 1991 through 1994, line-transect vessel surveys were conducted during spring in the northern Gulf of Mexico from the 200m isobath to the seaward extent of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). Survey effort-weighted estimated average abundance of undifferentiated beaked whales (*Mesoplodon* spp. and unidentified Ziphiidae) for all surveys combined was 117 (CV=0.38) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). Hansen *et al.* (1995) did not estimate the abundance of *Mesoplodon* spp. As recommended in the GAMMS Workshop Report (Wade and Angliss 1997), estimates older than 8 years are deemed unreliable, and therefore should not be used for PBR determinations.

Similar surveys were conducted during April/May from 1996 to 2001 (excluding 1998) in oceanic waters of the northern Gulf of Mexico, using NOAA ships *Oregon II* (1996, 1997, 1999) and *Gordon Gunter* (2000, 2001). Estimates for all oceanic strata were summed, as survey effort was not uniformly distributed, to calculate a total estimate for the entire northern Gulf of Mexico oceanic waters (Figure 1; Mullin and Fulling 2004). Due to limited

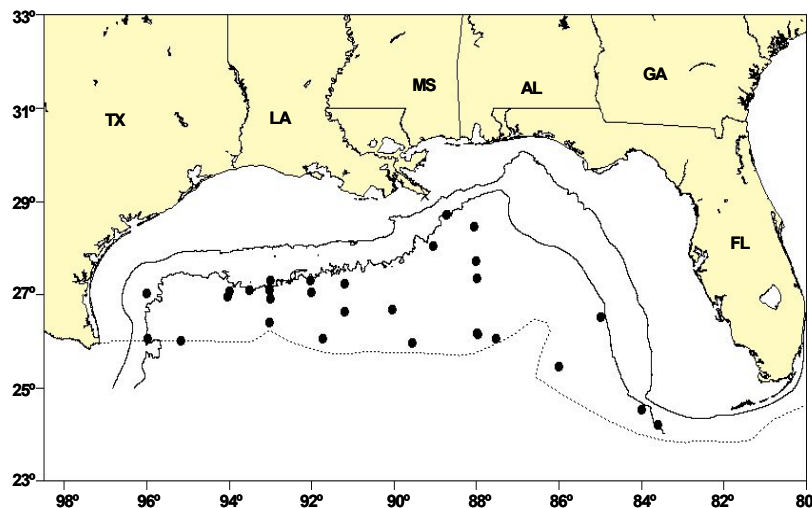


Figure 1. Distribution of beaked whale sightings (*Mesoplodon* spp.) from SEFSC spring vessel surveys during 1996-2001. All the on-effort sightings are shown, though not all were used to estimate abundance. Solid lines indicate the 100m and 1,000m isobaths and the dotted line indicates the offshore extent of the U.S. EEZ.

survey effort in any given year, survey effort was pooled across all years to develop an average abundance estimate.

The estimate of abundance for *Mesoplodon* spp. in oceanic waters, pooled from 1996 to 2001, is 106 (CV=0.41) (Mullin and Fulling 2004), which is the best available abundance estimate for these species in the northern Gulf of Mexico. This is a combined estimate for Gervais' beaked whale and Blainville's beaked whale. The estimate for the same time period for unidentified Ziphiidae is 146 (CV=0.46) which may also include an unknown number of Cuvier's beaked whales.

### **Minimum Population Estimate**

The minimum population estimate is the lower limit of the two-tailed 60% confidence interval of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate. This is equivalent to the 20th percentile of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate as specified by Wade and Angliss (1997). The best estimate of abundance for *Mesoplodon* spp. is 106 (CV = 0.41). The minimum population estimate for *Mesoplodon* spp. in the northern Gulf of Mexico is 76.

### **Current Population Trend**

There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species.

### **CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES**

For purposes of this assessment, the maximum net productivity rate was assumed to be 0.04. This value is based on theoretical modeling showing that cetacean populations may not grow at rates much greater than 4% given the constraints of their reproductive history (Barlow *et al.* 1995).

### **POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL**

Potential biological removal level (PBR) is the product of the minimum population size, one half the maximum net productivity rate and a recovery factor (MMPA Sec. 3.16 U.S.C. 1362; Wade and Angliss 1997). The minimum population size for *Mesoplodon* spp. is 76. The maximum productivity rate is 0.04, the default value for cetaceans. The "recovery" factor, which accounts for endangered, depleted, threatened stocks, or stocks of unknown status relative to optimum sustainable population (OSP), is assumed to be 0.5 because the stock is of unknown status. PBR for the northern Gulf of Mexico *Mesoplodon* spp. is 0.8. It is not possible to determine the PBR for only Blainville's beaked whales.

### **ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY**

There has been no reported fishing-related mortality of a beaked whale during 1998-2003 (Yeung 1999; Yeung 2001; Garrison 2003; Garrison and Richards 2004).

### **Fisheries Information**

The level of past or current, direct, human-caused mortality of beaked whales in the northern Gulf of Mexico is unknown. Pelagic swordfish, tunas and billfish are the targets of the longline fishery operating in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. There were no reports of mortality or serious injury to Blainville's or other beaked whales by this fishery.

### **Other Mortality**

There were 2 reported stranding events of beaked whales in the Gulf of Mexico during 1999-2003. Two unidentified beaked whales mass stranded in Florida in December 1999, and 1 unidentified *Mesoplodon* stranded in Florida in January 2003. There was no evidence of human interactions for these stranded animals. Stranding data probably underestimate the extent of fishery-related mortality and serious injury because not all of the marine mammals which die or are seriously injured in fishery interactions wash ashore, not all that wash ashore are discovered, reported or investigated, nor will all of those that do wash ashore necessarily show signs of entanglement or other fishery interaction. Finally, the level of technical expertise among stranding network personnel varies widely as does the ability to recognize signs of fishery interactions.

Several unusual mass strandings of beaked whales in North Atlantic marine environments have been associated with military naval activities. During the mid- to late 1980's multiple mass strandings of Cuvier's beaked whales (4 to about 20 per event) and small numbers of Gervais' beaked whales and Blainville's beaked whales occurred in the Canary Islands (Simmonds and Lopez-Jurado 1991). Twelve Cuvier's beaked whales that live stranded and subsequently died in the Mediterranean Sea on 12-13 May 1996 were associated with low frequency acoustic sonar tests conducted by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Frantzis 1998). In March 2000, 14 beaked

whales live stranded in the Bahamas; 6 beaked whales (5 Cuvier's and 1 Blainville's) died (Anon. 2001; Balcomb and Claridge 2001; Cox *et al.*, in review). Four Cuvier's, 2 Blainville's and 2 unidentified beaked whales were returned to sea. The fate of the animals returned to sea is unknown. Necropsies of 6 dead beaked whales revealed evidence of tissue trauma associated with an acoustic or impulse injury that caused the animals to strand. Subsequently, the animals died due to extreme physiologic stress associated with the physical stranding (i.e., hyperthermia, high endogenous catecholamine release) (Anon. 2001; Cox *et al.*, in review).

## STATUS OF STOCK

The status of Blainville's beaked whales or other beaked whales in the northern Gulf of Mexico, relative to OSP, is unknown. The species is not listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The total fishery-related mortality and serious injury for this stock is unknown, but assumed to be less than 10% of the calculated PBR and can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. This is a strategic stock because of uncertainty regarding stock size and evidence of human induced mortality and serious injury associated with acoustic activities.

Disturbance by anthropogenic noise may prove to be an important habitat issue in some areas of this population's range, notably in areas of oil and gas activities or where shipping or naval activities are high. Limited studies are currently being conducted to address this issue and its impact, if any, on this and other marine species.

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## CUVIER'S BEAKED WHALE (*Ziphius cavirostris*): Northern Gulf of Mexico Stock

### STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

Cuvier's beaked whales are distributed throughout the world's oceans except for the polar regions (Leatherwood and Reeves 1983; Heyning 1989). Strandings have occurred in all months along the east coast of the U.S. (Schmidly 1981) and throughout the year in the Gulf of Mexico (Würsig *et al.* 2000). Beaked whales were seen in all seasons during GulfCet aerial surveys of the northern Gulf of Mexico (Hansen *et al.* 1996; Mullin and Hoggard 2000). Some of the aerial survey sightings may have included Cuvier's beaked whale, but identification of beaked whale species from aerial surveys is problematic.

Strandings of Cuvier's beaked whales along the west coast of North America, based on skull characteristics, are thought to represent members of a panmictic population (Mitchell 1968), but there is no information on stock differentiation in the Gulf of Mexico and nearby waters. In the absence of adequate information on stock structure, a species' range within an ocean should be divided into defensible management units, and such management units include distinct oceanographic regions (Wade and Angliss 1997). The Gulf of Mexico population is provisionally being considered a separate stock for management purposes, although there is currently no information to differentiate this stock from the Atlantic Ocean stock(s). Additional morphological, genetic and/or behavioral data are needed to provide further information on stock delineation.

### POPULATION SIZE

Estimates of abundance were derived through the application of distance sampling analysis (Buckland *et al.* 2001) and the computer program DISTANCE (Thomas *et al.* 1998) to sighting data. From 1991 through 1994, line-transect vessel surveys were conducted during spring in the northern Gulf of Mexico from the 200m isobath to the seaward extent of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). Survey effort-weighted estimated average abundance of Cuvier's beaked whales for all surveys combined was 30 (CV=0.50). As recommended in the GAMMS Workshop Report (Wade and Angliss 1997), estimates older than 8 years are deemed unreliable, and therefore should not be used for PBR determinations.

Similar surveys were conducted during April/May from 1996 to 2001 (excluding 1998) in oceanic waters of the northern Gulf of Mexico, using NOAA ships *Oregon II* (1996, 1997, 1999) and *Gordon Gunter* (2000, 2001). Estimates for all oceanic strata were summed, as survey effort was not uniformly distributed, to calculate a total estimate for the entire northern Gulf of Mexico oceanic waters (Figure 1; Mullin and Fulling 2004). Due to limited survey effort in any given year, survey effort was pooled across all years to develop an average abundance estimate.

The estimate of abundance for Cuvier's beaked whales in oceanic waters, pooled from 1996 to 2001, is 95 (CV=0.47) (Mullin and Fulling 2004), which is the best available abundance estimate for this species in the northern Gulf of Mexico. The estimated abundance of Cuvier's beaked whales is negatively biased because only sightings of

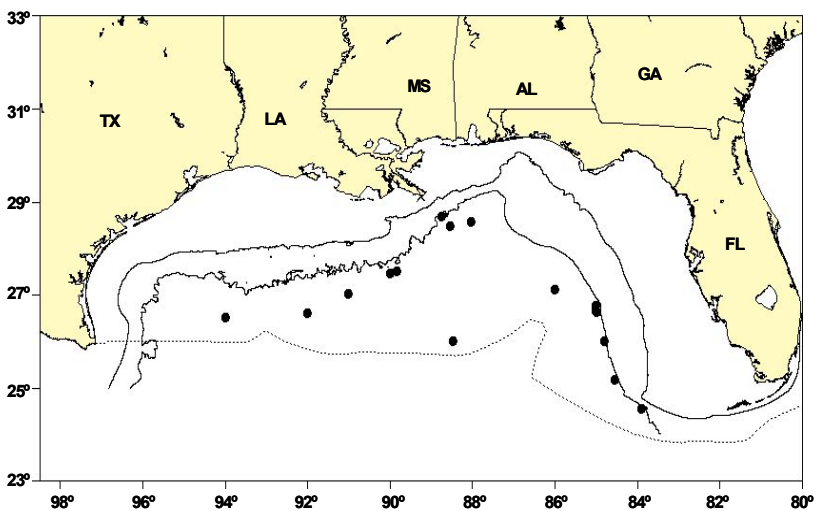


Figure 1. Distribution of Cuvier's beaked whale sightings from SEFSC spring vessel surveys during 1996-2001. All the on-effort sightings are shown, though not all were used to estimate abundance. Solid lines indicate the 100m and 1,000m isobaths and the dotted line indicates the offshore extent of the U.S. EEZ.

beaked whales which could be positively identified to species were used. The estimate for the same time period for unidentified Ziphiidae is 146 (CV=0.46) which may include an unknown number of *Mesoplodon* spp.

### **Minimum Population Estimate**

The minimum population estimate is the lower limit of the two-tailed 60% confidence interval of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate. This is equivalent to the 20th percentile of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate as specified by Wade and Angliss (1997). The best estimate of abundance for Cuvier's beaked whales is 95 (CV=0.47). The minimum population estimate for the northern Gulf of Mexico is 65 Cuvier's beaked whales.

### **Current Population Trend**

There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The pooled abundance estimate for 1996-2001 of 95 (CV=0.47) and that for 1991-1994 of 30 (CV=0.50) are not significantly different ( $P>0.05$ ), but due to the precision of the estimates, the power to detect a difference is low.

### **CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES**

For purposes of this assessment, the maximum net productivity rate was assumed to be 0.04. This value is based on theoretical modeling showing that cetacean populations may not grow at rates much greater than 4% given the constraints of their reproductive history (Barlow *et al.* 1995).

### **POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL**

Potential biological removal level (PBR) is the product of the minimum population size, one half the maximum net productivity rate and a recovery factor (MMPA Sec. 3.16 U.S.C. 1362; Wade and Angliss 1997). The minimum population size for the Cuvier's beaked whale is 65 (CV=0.47). The maximum productivity rate is 0.04, the default value for cetaceans. The recovery factor for this stock is 0.5 because the stock is of unknown status. PBR for the northern Gulf of Mexico Cuvier's beaked whale is 0.7.

### **ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY**

There has been no reported fishing-related mortality of a Cuvier's beaked whale during 1998-2003 (Yeung 1999; Yeung 2001; Garrison 2003; Garrison and Richards 2004).

### **Fisheries Information**

The level of past or current, direct, human-caused mortality of Cuvier's beaked whales in the northern Gulf of Mexico is unknown. Pelagic swordfish, tunas and billfish are the targets of the longline fishery operating in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. There were no reports of mortality or serious injury to Cuvier's beaked whales by this fishery.

### **Other Mortality**

Cuvier's beaked whales were taken occasionally in a small, directed fishery for cetaceans that operated out of the Lesser Antilles (Caldwell and Caldwell 1971). There were no reported strandings of Cuvier's beaked whales in the Gulf of Mexico during 1999-2003. Two unidentified beaked whales mass stranded in Florida in December 1999. Stranding data probably underestimate the extent of fishery-related mortality and serious injury because not all of the marine mammals which die or are seriously injured in fishery interactions wash ashore, not all that wash ashore are discovered, reported or investigated, nor will all of those that do wash ashore necessarily show signs of entanglement or other fishery-interaction. Finally, the level of technical expertise among stranding network personnel varies widely as does the ability to recognize signs of fishery interactions.

Several unusual mass strandings of beaked whales in North Atlantic marine environments have been associated with military naval activities. During the mid- to late 1980's multiple mass strandings of Cuvier's beaked whales (4 to about 20 per event) and small numbers of Gervais' beaked whales and Blainville's beaked whales occurred in the Canary Islands (Simmonds and Lopez-Jurado (1991). Twelve Cuvier's beaked whales that live stranded and subsequently died in the Mediterranean Sea on 12-13 May 1996 were associated with low frequency acoustic sonar tests conducted by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Frantzis 1998). In March 2000, 14 beaked whales live stranded in the Bahamas; 6 beaked whales (5 Cuvier's and 1 Blainville's) died (Anon. 2001; Balcomb and Claridge 2001; Cox *et al.*, in review). Four Cuvier's, 2 Blainville's, and 2 unidentified beaked whales were returned to sea. The fate of the animals returned to sea is unknown. Necropsies of 6 dead beaked whales revealed evidence of tissue trauma associated with an acoustic or impulse injury that caused the animals to strand.

Subsequently, the animals died due to extreme physiologic stress associated with the physical stranding (i.e., hyperthermia, high endogenous catecholamine release) (Anon. 2001; Cox *et al.*, in review).

## STATUS OF STOCK

The status of Cuvier's beaked whales in the northern Gulf of Mexico, relative to OSP, is unknown. The species is not listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The total fishery-related mortality and serious injury for this stock is unknown, but assumed to be less than 10% of the calculated PBR and can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. This is a strategic stock because of evidence of human induced mortality and serious injury associated with acoustic activities.

Disturbance by anthropogenic noise may prove to be an important habitat issue in some areas of this population's range, notably in areas of oil and gas activities or where shipping or naval activities are high. Limited studies are currently being conducted to address this issue and its impact, if any, on this and other marine species.

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## GERVAIS' BEAKED WHALE (*Mesoplodon europaeus*): Northern Gulf of Mexico Stock

### STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

Three species of *Mesoplodon* are known to occur in the Gulf of Mexico, based on stranding or sighting data (Hansen *et al.* 1995; Würsig *et al.* 2000). These are Blainville's beaked whale (*M. densirostris*), Gervais' beaked whale (*M. europaeus*), and Sowerby's beaked whale (*M. bidens*). Sowerby's beaked whale in the Gulf of Mexico is considered extralimital because there is only 1 known stranding of this species (Bonde and O'Shea 1989) and because it normally occurs in northern temperate waters of the North Atlantic (Mead 1989). Identification of *Mesoplodon* to species in the Gulf of Mexico is very difficult, and in many cases, *Mesoplodon* and Cuvier's beaked whale (*Ziphius cavirostris*) cannot be distinguished; therefore, sightings of beaked whales (Family Ziphiidae) are identified as *Mesoplodon* sp., Cuvier's beaked whale, or unidentified Ziphiidae.

Gervais' beaked whales appear to be widely but sparsely distributed in temperate and tropical waters of the world's oceans (Leatherwood *et al.* 1976; Leatherwood and Reeves 1983). Strandings have occurred along the northwestern Atlantic coast from Florida to Nova Scotia (Schmidly 1981), and there have been 16 documented strandings in the Gulf of Mexico (Würsig *et al.* 2000). Beaked whales were seen in all seasons during GulfCet aerial surveys of the northern Gulf of Mexico from 1992 to 1998 (Hansen *et al.* 1996; Mullin and Hoggard 2000). The Gulf of Mexico population is provisionally being considered a separate stock for management purposes, although there is currently no information to differentiate this stock from the Atlantic Ocean stock(s). Additional morphological, genetic and/or behavioral data are needed to provide further information on stock delineation.

### POPULATION SIZE

Estimates of abundance were derived through the application of distance sampling analysis (Buckland *et al.* 2001) and the computer program DISTANCE (Thomas *et al.* 1998) to sighting data. From 1991 through 1994, line-transect vessel surveys were conducted during spring in the northern Gulf of Mexico from the 200m isobath to the seaward extent of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). Survey effort-weighted estimated average abundance of undifferentiated beaked whales (*Ziphius* and *Mesoplodon* spp.) for all surveys combined was 117 (CV=0.38) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). Hansen *et al.* (1995) did not estimate the abundance of *Mesoplodon* spp. As recommended in the GAMMS Workshop Report (Wade and Angliss 1997), estimates older than 8 years are deemed unreliable, and therefore should not be used for PBR determinations.

Similar surveys were conducted during April/May from 1996 to 2001 (excluding 1998) in oceanic waters of the northern Gulf of Mexico, using NOAA ships *Oregon II* (1996, 1997, 1999) and *Gordon Gunter* (2000, 2001). Estimates for all oceanic strata were summed, as survey effort was not uniformly distributed, to calculate a total estimate for the entire northern Gulf of Mexico oceanic waters (Figure 1; Mullin and Fulling 2004). Due to limited survey effort in any given year, survey effort was pooled across all years to develop an average abundance estimate.

The estimate of abundance for *Mesoplodon* spp. in oceanic waters, pooled from 1996 to 2001, is 106

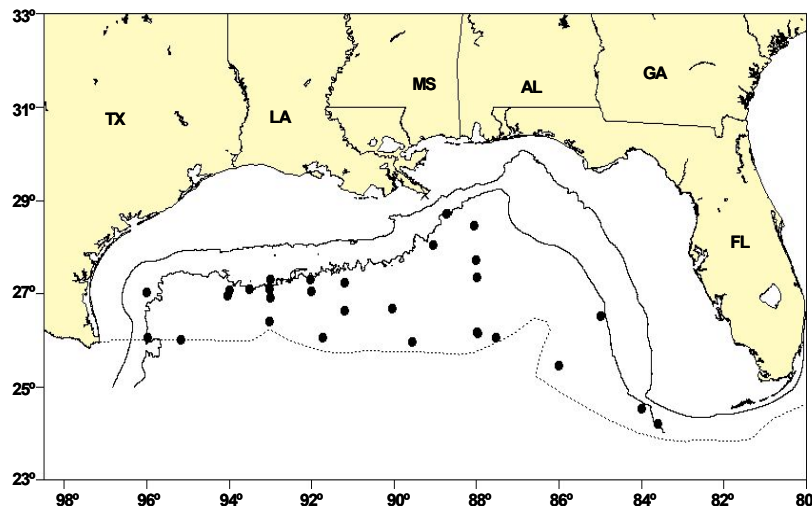


Figure 1. Distribution of beaked whale sightings (*Mesoplodon* spp.) from SEFSC spring vessel surveys during 1996-2001. All the on-effort sightings are shown, though not all were used to estimate abundance. Solid lines indicate the 100m and 1,000m isobaths and the dotted line indicates the offshore extent of the U.S. EEZ.

(CV=0.41) (Mullin and Fulling 2004), which is the best available abundance estimate for these species in the northern Gulf of Mexico. This is a combined estimate for Blainville's beaked whale and Gervais' beaked whale. The estimate for the same time period for unidentified Ziphiidae is 146 (CV=0.46) which may also include an unknown number of Cuvier's beaked whales.

### **Minimum Population Estimate**

The minimum population estimate is the lower limit of the two-tailed 60% confidence interval of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate. This is equivalent to the 20th percentile of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate as specified by Wade and Angliss (1997). The best estimate of abundance for *Mesoplodon* spp. is 106 (CV = 0.41). The minimum population estimate for *Mesoplodon* spp. in the northern Gulf of Mexico is 76.

### **Current Population Trend**

There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species.

### **CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES**

For purposes of this assessment, the maximum net productivity rate was assumed to be 0.04. This value is based on theoretical modeling showing that cetacean populations may not grow at rates much greater than 4% given the constraints of their reproductive history (Barlow *et al.* 1995).

### **POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL**

Potential biological removal level (PBR) is the product of the minimum population size, one half the maximum net productivity rate and a recovery factor (MMPA Sec. 3.16 U.S.C. 1362; Wade and Angliss 1997). The minimum population size for *Mesoplodon* spp. is 76. The maximum productivity rate is 0.04, the default value for cetaceans. The "recovery" factor, which accounts for endangered, depleted, threatened stocks, or stocks of unknown status relative to optimum sustainable population (OSP), is assumed to be 0.5 because the stock is of unknown status. PBR for the northern Gulf of Mexico *Mesoplodon* spp. is 0.8. It is not possible to determine the PBR for only Gervais' beaked whales.

### **ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY**

There has been no reported fishing-related mortality of a beaked whale during 1998-2003 (Yeung 1999; Yeung 2001; Garrison 2003; Garrison and Richards 2004).

### **Fisheries Information**

The level of past or current, direct, human-caused mortality of beaked whales in the northern Gulf of Mexico is unknown. Pelagic swordfish, tunas and billfish are the targets of the longline fishery operating in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. There were no reports of mortality or serious injury to Gervais' or other beaked whales by this fishery.

### **Other Mortality**

There were 2 reported stranding events of beaked whales in the Gulf of Mexico during 1999-2003. Two unidentified beaked whales mass stranded in Florida in December 1999, and 1 unidentified *Mesoplodon* stranded in Florida in January 2003. There was no evidence of human interactions for these stranded animals. Stranding data probably underestimate the extent of fishery-related mortality and serious injury because not all of the marine mammals which die or are seriously injured in fishery interactions wash ashore, not all that wash ashore are discovered, reported or investigated, nor will all of those that do wash ashore necessarily show signs of entanglement or other fishery interaction. Finally, the level of technical expertise among stranding network personnel varies widely as does the ability to recognize signs of fishery interactions.

Several unusual mass strandings of beaked whales in North Atlantic marine environments have been associated with military naval activities. During the mid- to late 1980's multiple mass strandings of Cuvier's beaked whales (4 to about 20 per event) and small numbers of Gervais' beaked whales and Blainville's beaked whales occurred in the Canary Islands (Simmonds and Lopez-Jurado 1991). Twelve Cuvier's beaked whales that live stranded and subsequently died in the Mediterranean Sea on 12-13 May 1996 were associated with low frequency acoustic sonar tests conducted by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Frantzis 1998). In March 2000, 14 beaked whales live stranded in the Bahamas; 6 beaked whales (5 Cuvier's and 1 Blainville's) died (Anon. 2001; Balcomb and Claridge 2001; Cox *et al.*, in review). Four Cuvier's, 2 Blainville's, and 2 unidentified beaked whales were

returned to sea. The fate of the animals returned to sea is unknown. Necropsies of 6 dead beaked whales revealed evidence of tissue trauma associated with an acoustic or impulse injury that caused the animals to strand. Subsequently, the animals died due to extreme physiologic stress associated with the physical stranding (i.e., hyperthermia, high endogenous catecholamine release) (Anon. 2001; Cox *et al.*, in review).

## STATUS OF STOCK

The status of Gervais' beaked whales or other beaked whales in the northern Gulf of Mexico, relative to OSP, is unknown. The species is not listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The total fishery-related mortality and serious injury for this stock is unknown, but assumed to be less than 10% of the calculated PBR and can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. This is a strategic stock because of uncertainty regarding stock size and evidence of human induced mortality and serious injury associated with acoustic activities.

Disturbance by anthropogenic noise may prove to be an important habitat issue in some areas of this population's range, notably in areas of oil and gas activities or where shipping or naval activities are high. Limited studies are currently being conducted to address this issue and its impact, if any, on this and other marine species.

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## **BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN (*Tursiops truncatus*): Gulf of Mexico Bay, Sound, and Estuarine Stocks**

### **STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE**

Bottlenose dolphins are distributed throughout the bays, sounds and estuaries of the Gulf of Mexico (Mullin 1988). The identification of biologically-meaningful “stocks” of bottlenose dolphins in these waters is complicated by the high degree of behavioral variability exhibited by this species (Shane *et al.* 1986; Wells and Scott 1999; Wells 2003), and by the lack of requisite information for much of the region.

Distinct stocks are provisionally identified in each of 33 areas of contiguous, enclosed or semi-enclosed bodies of water adjacent to the Gulf of Mexico (Table 1, based on descriptions of relatively discrete dolphin “communities” in some of these areas. A “community” includes resident dolphins that regularly share large portions of their ranges, exhibit similar distinct genetic profiles, and interact with each other to a much greater extent than with dolphins in adjacent waters. The term, as adapted from Wells *et al.* (1987), emphasizes geographic, genetic and social relationships of dolphins. Bottlenose dolphin communities do not constitute closed demographic populations, as individuals from adjacent communities are known to interbreed. Nevertheless, the geographic nature of these areas and long-term stability of residency patterns suggest that many of these communities exist as functioning units of their ecosystems, and under the Marine Mammal Protection Act must be maintained as such. Also, the stable patterns of residency observed within communities suggest that long periods would be required to repopulate the home range of a community were it eradicated or severely depleted. Thus, in the absence of information supporting management on a larger scale, it is appropriate to adopt a risk-averse approach and focus management efforts at the level of the community rather than at some larger demographic scale. Biological support for this risk-averse approach derives from several sources. Long-term (year-round, multi-year) residency by at least some individuals has been reported from nearly every site where photographic identification or tagging studies have been conducted in the Gulf of Mexico. In Texas, some of the dolphins in the Matagorda-Espiritu Santo Bay area (Gruber 1981; Lynn and Würsig 2002), Aransas Pass (Shane 1977; Weller 1998), San Luis Pass (Maze and Würsig 1999; Irwin and Würsig 2004), and Galveston Bay (Bräger 1993; Bräger *et al.* 1994; Fertl 1994) have been reported as long-term residents. Hubard *et al.* (2004) reported sightings of dolphins tagged 12-15 years previously in Mississippi Sound. In Florida, long-term residency has been reported from Choctawhatchee Bay (1989-1993), Tampa Bay (Wells 1986a; Wells *et al.* 1996a), Sarasota Bay (Irvine and Wells 1972; Irvine *et al.* 1981; Wells 1986a, 1991; Scott *et al.* 1990; Wells *et al.* 1987; Wells 2003), Lemon Bay (Wells *et al.* 1996b) and Charlotte Harbor/Pine Island Sound (Shane 1990; Wells *et al.* 1996b, 1997; Shane 2004). In Louisiana, Miller (2004) concluded the bottlenose dolphin population in the Barataria Basin was relatively closed. In many cases, residents emphasize use of the bay, sound or estuary waters, with limited movements through passes to the Gulf of Mexico (Shane 1977, 1990; Gruber 1981; Irvine *et al.* 1981; Maze and Würsig 1999; Fazioli and Wells 1999; Lynn and Würsig 2002). These habitat use patterns are reflected in the ecology of the dolphins in some areas; for example, residents of Sarasota Bay, Florida, lacked squid in their diet, unlike non-resident dolphins stranded on nearby Gulf beaches (Barros and Wells 1998).

Genetic data also support the concept of relatively discrete bay, sound and estuary stocks. Analyses of mitochondrial DNA haplotype distributions indicate the existence of clinal variations along the Gulf of Mexico coastline (Duffield and Wells 2002). Differences in reproductive seasonality from site to site also suggest genetic-based distinctions between communities (Urian *et al.* 1996). Mitochondrial DNA analyses suggest finer-scale structural levels as well. For example, Matagorda Bay, Texas, dolphins appear to be a localized population, and differences in haplotype frequencies distinguish between adjacent communities in Tampa Bay, Sarasota Bay and Charlotte Harbor/Pine Island Sound, along the central west coast of Florida (Duffield and Wells 1991 2002). Examination of protein electrophoretic data resulted in similar conclusions for the Florida dolphins (Duffield and Wells 1986). Additionally, Sellas (2002) found significant genetic differentiation between Sarasota Bay resident dolphins and those occurring primarily in adjacent Gulf coastal waters.

The long-term structure and stability of at least some of these communities is exemplified by the residents of Sarasota Bay, Florida. This community has been observed since 1970 (Irvine and Wells 1972; Scott *et al.* 1990; Wells 1991). At least 4 generations of identifiable residents currently inhabit the region, including one-third of those first identified in 1970. Maximum immigration and emigration rates of about 2-3% have been estimated (Wells and Scott 1990).

Genetic exchange occurs between resident communities; hence the application of the demographically and behaviorally-based term “community” rather than “population” (Wells 1986a; Sellas *et al.* in review). Some of the calves in Sarasota Bay apparently have been sired by non-residents (Duffield and Wells 2002). A variety of potential exchange mechanisms occur in the Gulf. Small numbers of inshore dolphins traveling between regions have been reported, with patterns ranging from traveling through adjacent communities (Wells 1986b; Wells *et al.* 1996a,b) to movements over distances of several hundred km in Texas waters (Gruber 1981; Würsig and Lynn 1996). In many areas year-round residents co-occur with non-resident dolphins, providing potential opportunities for genetic exchange. About 17% of group sightings involving resident Sarasota Bay dolphins include at least 1 non-resident as well (Wells *et al.* 1987). Similar mixing of inshore residents and non-residents is seen off San Luis Pass, Texas (Maze and Würsig 1999), and Pine Island Sound, Florida (Shane 2004). Non-residents exhibit a variety of patterns, ranging from apparent nomadism recorded as transience in a given area, to apparent seasonal or non-

seasonal migrations. Passes, especially the mouths of the larger estuaries, serve as mixing areas. For example, several communities mix at the mouth of Tampa Bay, Florida (Wells 1986a), and most of the dolphins identified in the mouths of Galveston Bay and Aransas Pass, Texas, were considered transients (Henningsen 1991; Bräger 1993; Weller 1998).

Seasonal movements of dolphins into and out of some of the bays, sounds and estuaries provide additional opportunities for genetic exchange with residents, and complicate the identification of stocks in coastal and inshore waters. In small bay systems such as Sarasota Bay, Florida, and San Luis Pass, Texas, residents move into Gulf coastal waters in fall/winter, and return inshore in spring/summer (Irvine *et al.* 1981; Maze and Würsig 1999). In larger bay systems, seasonal changes in abundance suggest possible migrations, with increases in more northerly bay systems in summer, and in more southerly systems in winter. Fall/winter increases in abundance have been noted for Tampa Bay (Scott *et al.* 1989) and Charlotte Harbor/Pine Island Sound (Thompson 1981; Scott *et al.* 1989), and are thought to occur in Matagorda Bay (Gruber 1981; Lynn 1995; Würsig and Lynn 1996) and Aransas Pass (Shane 1977; Weller 1998). Spring/summer increases in abundance occur in Mississippi Sound (Hubard *et al.* 2004) and are thought to occur in Galveston Bay (Henningsen 1991; Bräger 1993; Fertl 1994).

Much uncertainty remains regarding the structure of bottlenose dolphin stocks in many of the Gulf of Mexico bays, sounds and estuaries. Given the apparent co-occurrence of resident and non-resident dolphins in these areas, and the demonstrated variations in abundance, it appears that consideration should be given to the existence of a complex of stocks, and to the roles of bays, sounds and estuaries for stocks emphasizing Gulf of Mexico coastal waters. A starting point for management strategy should be the protection of the long-term resident communities, with their multi-generational geographic, genetic, demographic and social stability. These localized units would be at greatest risk from geographically-localized impacts. Complete characterization of many of these basic units would benefit from additional photo-identification, telemetry and genetic research (Wells 1994).

The current provisional stocks follow the designations in Table 1, with a few revisions. Available information suggests that Block B35, Little Sarasota Bay, can be subsumed under Sarasota Bay, and B36, Caloosahatchee River, can be considered a part of Pine Island Sound. As more information becomes available, additional combination or division may be warranted. For example, a number of geographically and socially distinct subgroupings of dolphins in regions such as Tampa Bay, Charlotte Harbor, Pine Island Sound, Aransas Pass and Matagorda Bay have been identified, but the importance of these distinctions to stock designations remain undetermined (Shane 1977; Gruber 1981; Wells *et al.* 1996a,b, 1997; Lynn and Würsig 2002; Urian 2002).

Understanding the full complement of the stock complex using the bay, sound and estuarine waters of the Gulf of Mexico will require much additional information. The development of biologically-based criteria to better define and manage stocks in this region should integrate multiple approaches, including studies of ranging patterns, genetics, morphology, social patterns, distribution, life history, stomach contents, isozyme analyses and contaminant concentrations. Spatially-explicit population modeling could aid in evaluating the implications of community-based stock definition. As these studies provide new information on what constitutes a bottlenose dolphin "biological stock," current provisional definitions will likely need to be revised. As stocks are more clearly identified, it will be possible to conduct abundance estimates using standardized methodology across sites (thereby avoiding some of the previous problems of mixing results of aerial and boat-based surveys), identify fisheries and other human impacts relative to specific stocks and perform individual stock assessments. As recommended by the Atlantic Scientific Review Group (November 1998, Portland, Maine), an expert panel reviewed the stock structure for bottlenose dolphins in the Gulf of Mexico during a workshop in March 2000 (Hubard and Swartz 2002). The panel sought to describe the scope of risks faced by bottlenose dolphins in the Gulf of Mexico, and outline an approach by which the stock structure could most efficiently be investigated and integrated with data from previous and ongoing studies. The panel agreed that it was appropriate to use the precautionary approach and retain the stocks currently named until further studies are conducted, and made a variety of recommendations for future research (Hubard and Swartz 2002). As a result of this, efforts are being made to conduct research in new locations, such as the central Gulf, in addition to the ongoing studies in Texas and Florida.

Table 1. Previous bottlenose dolphin abundance ( $N_{BEST}$ ), coefficient of variation (CV) and minimum population estimate ( $N_{MIN}$ ) in U.S. Gulf of Mexico bays, sounds and estuaries. Because they are based on data collected more than 8 years ago, all estimates are considered unknown for management purposes. Blocks refer to 33 aerial survey blocks illustrated in Figure 1. PBR - Potential Biological Removal; UNK - unknown.

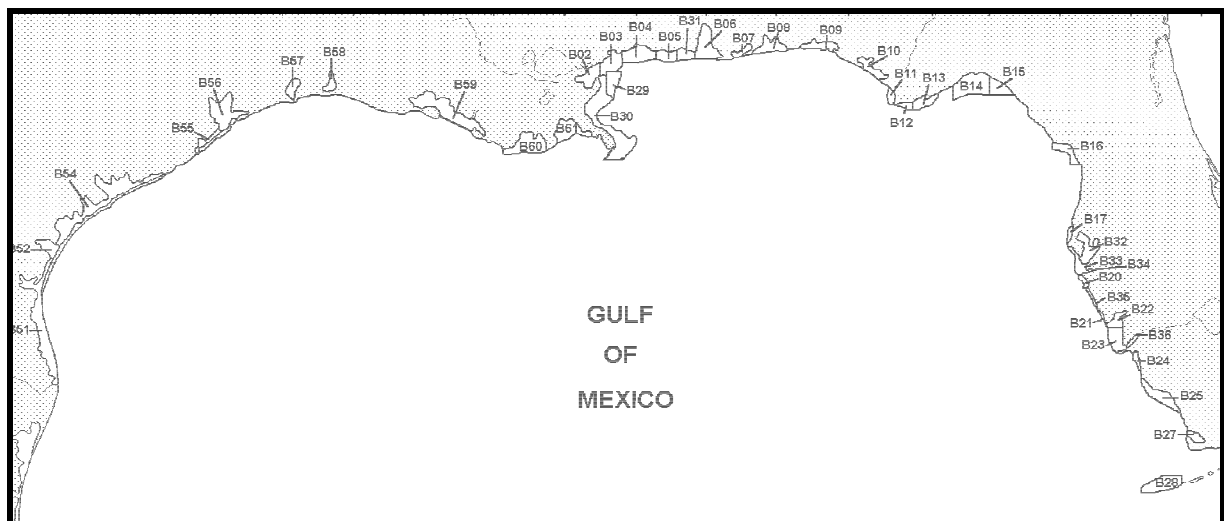
Blocks	Gulf of Mexico Estuary	$N_{BEST}$	CV	$N_{MIN}$	PBR	Year	Reference
B51	Laguna Madre	80	1.57	31	UNK	1992	A
B52	Nueces Bay, Corpus Christi Bay	58	0.61	36	UNK	1992	A
B50	Compano Bay, Aransas Bay, San Antonio Bay, Redfish Bay, Espiritu Santo Bay	55	0.82	30	UNK	1992	A
B54	Matagorda Bay, Tres Palacios Bay, Lavaca Bay	61	0.45	42	UNK	1992	A
B55	West Bay	32	0.15	28	0.3	2000	E
B56	Galveston Bay, East Bay, Trinity Bay	152	0.43	107	UNK	1992	A
B57	Sabine Lake	0 <sup>1</sup>	-		UNK	1992	A
B58	Calcasieu Lake	0 <sup>1</sup>	-		UNK	1992	A

B59	Vermillion Bay, West Cote Blanche Bay, Atchafalaya Bay	0 <sup>1</sup>	-	UNK	1992	A	
B60	Terrebonne Bay, Timbalier Bay	100	0.53	66	UNK	1993	A
B61	Barataria Bay	138	0.08	129	1.3	2001	D
B30	Mississippi River Delta	0 <sup>1</sup>	-	UNK	1993	A	
B02-05, 29,31	Bay Boudreau, Mississippi Sound	1,401	0.13	1,256	UNK	1993	A
B06	Mobile Bay, Bonsecour Bay	122	0.34	92	UNK	1993	A
B07	Perdido Bay	0 <sup>1</sup>	-	UNK	1993	A	
B08	Pensacola Bay, East Bay	33	0.80	18	UNK	1993	A
B09	Choctawhatchee Bay	242	0.31	188	UNK	1993	A
B10	St. Andrew Bay	124	0.57	79	UNK	1993	A
B11	St. Joseph Bay	0 <sup>1</sup>	-	UNK	1993	A	
B12-13	St. Vincent Sound, Apalachicola Bay, St. Georges Sound	387	0.34	293	UNK	1993	A
B14-15	Apalachee Bay	491	0.39	358	UNK	1993	A
B16	Waccasassa Bay, Withlacoochee Bay, Crystal Bay	100	0.85	54	UNK	1994	A
B17	St. Joseph Sound, Clearwater Harbor	37	1.06	18	UNK	1994	A
B32-34	Tampa Bay	559	0.24	458	UNK	1994	A
B20	Sarasota Bay	97	na <sup>3</sup>	97	UNK	1992	B
B35	Little Sarasota Bay	2 <sup>2</sup>	0.24	2	UNK	1985	C
B21	Lemon Bay	0 <sup>1</sup>	-	UNK	1994	A	
B22-23	Pine Sound, Charlotte Harbor, Gasparilla Sound	209	0.38	153	UNK	1994	A
B36	Caloosahatchee River	0 <sup>1,2</sup>	-	UNK	1985	C	
B24	Estero Bay	104	0.67	62	UNK	1994	A
B25	Chokoloskee Bay, Ten Thousand Islands, Gullivan Bay	208	0.46	144	UNK	1994	A
B27	Whitewater Bay	242	0.37	179	UNK	1994	A
B28	Florida Keys (Bahia Honda to Key West)	29	1.00	14	UNK	1994	A

References: A- Blaylock and Hoggard 1994; B- Wells 1992; C- Scott *et al.* 1989; D- Miller 2003; E- Irwin and Würsig 2004

Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> During earlier surveys (Scott *et al.* 1989), the range of seasonal abundances was as follows: B57, 0-2 (CV= 0.38); B58, 0-6 (0.34); B59, 0-0; B30, 0-182(0.14); B07, 0-0; B21, 0-15(0.43); and B36, 0-0.
- <sup>2</sup> Block not surveyed during surveys reported in Blaylock and Hoggard 1994.
- <sup>3</sup> No CV because N<sub>BEST</sub> was a direct count of known individuals.



**Figure 1.** U.S. Gulf of Mexico bays and sounds. Each of the alpha-numerically designated blocks corresponds to 1 of the NMFS Southeast Fisheries Science Center logistical aerial survey areas listed in Table 1. The bottlenose dolphins inhabiting each bay and sound are considered to comprise a unique stock for purposes of this assessment.

## POPULATION SIZE

Population size estimates for most of the stocks are greater than 8 years old and therefore the current population size for each stock is considered unknown (Wade and Angliss 1997). Recent mark-recapture population size estimates are available for West Bay, Texas, and Barataria Bay, Louisiana (Table 1). Previous population size (Table 1) was estimated from preliminary analyses of line-transect data collected during aerial surveys conducted in September-October 1992 in Texas and Louisiana; in September-October 1993 in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and the Florida panhandle (Blaylock and Hoggard 1994); and in September-November 1994 along the west coast of Florida (NMFS unpublished data). Standard line-transect perpendicular sighting distance analytical methods (Buckland *et al.* 1993) and the computer program DISTANCE (Laake *et al.* 1993) were used. Stock size in Sarasota Bay, Florida, was obtained through direct count of known individuals (Wells 1992).

### **Minimum Population Estimate**

The population size for most stocks is currently unknown. The recent or the previous minimum population estimates are given for each stock in Table 1. The minimum population estimate is the lower limit of the two-tailed 60% confidence interval of the log-normally distributed abundance estimate. This is equivalent to the 20th percentile of the log-normal distribution as specified by Wade and Angliss (1997). The minimum population estimate was calculated for each block from the estimated population size and its associated coefficient of variation. Where the population size resulted from a direct count of known individuals, the minimum population size was identical to the estimated population size.

### **Current Population Trend**

The data are insufficient to determine population trends for all of the Gulf of Mexico bay, sound and estuary bottlenose dolphin communities. The Sarasota Bay community, however, has been monitored since 1970 and has remained relatively constant through 1997 at approximately 105 animals (Wells 1998). Six anomalous mortality events have occurred among portions of these dolphin communities between 1990 and 2004; however, it is not possible to accurately partition the mortalities between bay and coastal stocks, thus the impact of these mortality events on communities is not known.

For Barataria Bay, Louisiana, Miller (2004) estimated a population size ranging from 138 to 238 bottlenose dolphins (95% CI = 128-297) using mark-recapture techniques with data collected from June 1999 to May 2002. The previous estimate for Barataria Bay from 1994, 219 dolphins, falls at the high end of this range. Irwin and Würsig (2004) estimated annual population sizes ranging from 28 to 38 dolphins during 1997-2001 for the San Luis Pass/Chocolate portion of West Bay, Texas, where the previous estimate from 1992 was 29 dolphins.

### **CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES**

Current and maximum net productivity rates are not known for the dolphin communities that comprise these stocks. While productivity rates may be estimated for individual females within communities, such estimates are confounded at the stock level due to the influx of dolphins from adjacent areas which balance losses, and the unexplained loss of some individuals which offset births and recruitment (Wells 1998). Continued monitoring and expanded survey coverage will be required to address and develop estimates of productivity for these dolphin communities. The maximum net productivity rate was assumed to be 0.04. This value is based on theoretical modeling showing that cetacean populations may not grow at rates much greater than 4% given the constraints of their reproductive life history (Barlow *et al.* 1995).

### **POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL**

Potential Biological Removal (PBR) is unknown for most stocks because the population size estimate is more than 8 years old. PBR is the product of minimum population size, one-half the maximum productivity rate and a "recovery" factor (Wade and Angliss 1997). The "recovery" factor, which accounts for endangered, depleted, and threatened stocks, or stocks of unknown status relative to optimum sustainable population (OSP), is assumed to be 0.5 because these stocks are of unknown status. PBR for those stocks with population size estimates less than 8 years old is given in Table 1.

### **ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY**

There are a number of difficulties associated with the interpretation of stranding data. It is possible that some or all of the stranded dolphins may have been from a nearby coastal stock; however, the proportion of stranded dolphins belonging to another stock cannot be determined because of the difficulty of determining from where the stranded carcasses originated. Stranding data probably underestimate the extent of fishery-related mortality and serious injury because not all of the dolphins which die or are seriously injured in fishery interactions wash ashore, nor will all of those that do wash ashore necessarily show signs of entanglement or other fishery-interaction. Finally, the level of technical expertise among stranding network personnel varies widely as does the ability to recognize signs of fishery interaction, and the condition of the carcass if badly decomposed can inhibit the interpretation of cause of death.

A total of 1,377 bottlenose dolphins were found stranded in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico from 1999 through 2003 (Table 2) (NMFS unpublished data). Of these, 73 or 11% showed evidence of human interactions as the cause of death (e.g., gear entanglement, mutilation, gunshot wounds). Bottlenose dolphins are known to become entangled in recreational and commercial fishing gear (Wells and Scott 1994; Wells *et al.* 1998; Gorzelany 1998) and some are struck by recreational and commercial vessels (Wells and Scott 1997). In 1998 alone, 2 resident bottlenose dolphins



and an associated calf were killed by vessel strikes and a resident young-of-the-year died from entanglement in a crab-pot float line (R.S. Wells, pers. comm.).

The Gulf of Mexico menhaden fishery was observed to take 9 bottlenose dolphins (3 fatally) between 1992 and 1995 (NMFS unpublished data). During that period, there were 1,366 sets observed out of 26,097 total sets, which if extrapolated for all years suggests that as many as 172 bottlenose dolphins could have been taken in this fishery with up to 57 animals killed. Without an observer program it is not possible to obtain statistically reliable information for this fishery on the number of sets annually, the incidental take and mortality rates, and the communities from which bottlenose dolphins are being taken.

Some of the bay, sound and estuarine communities were the focus of a live-capture fishery for bottlenose dolphins which supplied dolphins to the U.S. Navy and to oceanaria for research and public display for more than 2 decades ending in 1989 (NMFS unpublished data). During the period between 1972-89, 490 bottlenose dolphins, an average of 29 dolphins annually, were removed from a few locations in the Gulf of Mexico, including the Florida Keys. Mississippi Sound sustained the highest level of removals with 202 dolphins taken from this stock during this period, representing 41% of the total and an annual average of 12 dolphins (compared to a previous PBR of 13). The annual average number of removals never exceeded previous PBR levels, but it may be biologically significant that 73% of the dolphins removed during 1982-88 were females. The impact of those removals on the stocks is unknown.

Feeding or provisioning, and swimming with wild bottlenose dolphins have been documented in Florida, particularly near Panama City Beach in the Panhandle. Feeding wild dolphins is defined under the MMPA as a form of 'take' because it can alter their natural behavior and increase their risk of injury or death. Nevertheless, Samuels and Bejder (2004) observed a high rate of uncontrolled provisioning near Panama City Beach in 1998. The effects of swim-with activities on dolphins and their legality under the MMPA are less clear and are currently under review. Near Panama City Beach, Samuels and Bejder (2004) concluded that dolphins were amenable to swimmers due to provisioning.

### Fishery Information

The commercial fisheries which potentially could interact with these stocks in the Gulf of Mexico are the shrimp trawl, blue crab trap/pot, stone crab trap/pot, menhaden and gillnet fisheries (Appendix I). Historically, there have been very low numbers of incidental mortality or injury in the stocks associated with the shrimp trawl fishery. Bottlenose dolphins have been reported stranded with polypropylene rope around their flukes (NMFS 1991; McFee and Brooks, Jr. 1998; NMFS unpublished data), indicating the possibility of entanglement with crab pot lines. The blue crab fishery has not been monitored by observers and there are no estimates of bottlenose dolphin mortality or serious injury for this fishery. There is no observer program data for the menhaden fishery but incidental mortality of bottlenose dolphins has been reported for this fishery (Reynolds 1985). No marine mammal mortalities associated with gillnet fisheries have been reported, but stranding data suggest that gillnet and marine mammal interaction does occur, causing mortality and serious injury. In 1995, a Florida state constitutional amendment banned gillnets and large nets from bay, sounds, estuaries and other inshore waters.

Table 2. Bottlenose dolphin strandings in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico (West Florida to Texas) from 1999 to 2003. Data are from the Southeast Marine Mammal Stranding Database (SESUS). Percent of animals with human interactions were calculated based on animals which were determined as "yes" or "no" for human interactions. Animals that were "CBD" (could not be determined) were excluded from % with human interactions calculations.

State		1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	Total
Florida	No. Stranded	156	130	57	82 <sup>1</sup>	64 <sup>4</sup>	483
	No. Human Interactions	5	8	2	6	7	28
	No. CBD	106	76	26	44	34	286
	% With Human Interactions	10%	15%	6%	16%	23%	14%
Alabama	No. Stranded	12	15	17	12	7	63
	No. Human Interactions	0	0	2	0	1	3
	No. CBD	8	7	8	9	4	36
	% With Human Interactions	0%	0%	22%	0%	33%	11%
Mississippi	No. Stranded	25	27	22	21 <sup>2</sup>	37 <sup>5</sup>	126
	No. Human Interactions	0	1	0	0	0	1
	No. CBD	17	15	8	6	29	75

	% With Human Interactions	0%	8%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Louisiana							
	No. Stranded	25	14	0	2	33 <sup>6</sup>	69
	No. Human Interactions	1	0	-	0	0	1
	No. CBD	19	14	-	2	29	64
	% With Human Interactions	17%	CBD	-	CBD	0%	20%
Texas							
	No. Stranded	102	113	116	154 <sup>3</sup>	154 <sup>7</sup>	636
	No. Human Interactions	2	7	6	15	10	40
	No. CBD	40	47	5	57	101	250
	% With Human Interactions	3%	11%	5%	15%	19%	10%
Totals							
	No. Stranded	320	299	212	271	295	1377
	No. Human Interactions	8	16	10	21	18	73
	No. CBD	190	159	47	118	197	711
	% With Human Interactions	6%	11%	6%	14%	18%	11%

- 1 Florida mass stranding of 2 animals in December 2002
- 2 Mississippi mass stranding of 2 animals in March 2002
- 3 Texas mass strandings (2 animals in January 2002, 2 animals in March 2002)
- 4 Florida mass stranding of 2 animals in May 2003
- 5 Mississippi mass stranding of 2 animals in April 2003
- 6 Louisiana mass stranding of 3 animals in July 2003
- 7 Texas mass stranding of 5 animals in March 2003

### Other Mortality

The nearshore habitat occupied by many of these stocks is adjacent to areas of high human population, and in some bays, such as Mobile Bay in Alabama and Galveston Bay in Texas, is highly industrialized. The area surrounding Galveston Bay, for example, has a coastal population of over 3 million people. More than 50% of all chemical products manufactured in the U.S. are produced there and 17% of the oil produced in the Gulf of Mexico is refined there (Henningson and Würsig 1991). Many of the enclosed bays in Texas are surrounded by agricultural lands which receive periodic pesticide applications.

Concentrations of chlorinated hydrocarbons and metals were examined in conjunction with an anomalous mortality event of bottlenose dolphins in Texas bays in 1990 and found to be relatively low in most; however, some had concentrations at levels of possible toxicological concern (Varanasi *et al.* 1992). No studies to date have determined the amount, if any, of indirect human-induced mortality resulting from pollution or habitat degradation. Since 1990, there have been 6 bottlenose dolphin die-offs in the northern Gulf of Mexico. From January through May 1990, a total of 367 bottlenose dolphins stranded in the northern Gulf of Mexico. Overall this represented a two-fold increase in the prior maximum recorded strandings for the same period, but in some locations (i.e., Alabama) strandings were 10 times the average number. The cause of the 1990 mortality event could not be determined (Hansen 1992). In March and April 1992, 111 bottlenose dolphins stranded in Texas; about 9 times the average number. Seven of 34 live-captured bottlenose dolphins (20%) in 1992 from Matagorda Bay, Texas, tested positive for previous exposure to cetacean morbillivirus, and it is possible that other estuarine resident stocks have been exposed to the morbillivirus (Duignan *et al.* 1996).

In 1992, NOAA Fisheries' Working Group on Unusual Marine Mortality Events was formalized and developed protocols to declare Unusual Mortality Events (UME) and respond to them. Since 1992, 4 UMEs involving bottlenose dolphins have been investigated in the Gulf of Mexico. In 1993-1994 a UME of bottlenose dolphins caused by morbillivirus started in the Florida Panhandle and spread west with most of the mortalities occurring in Texas (Lipscomb 1993; Lipscomb *et al.* 1994). In 1996 a UME was declared for bottlenose dolphins in Mississippi and while the cause was not determined, *Karenia brevis* (red tide) was suspected. Between August 1999 and February 2000, at least 120 bottlenose dolphins died coincident with *K. brevis* blooms and fish kills in the Florida Panhandle. In March and April 2004, in another Florida Panhandle UME possibly related to *K. brevis* blooms, 107 bottlenose dolphins stranded dead (NOAA Fisheries 2004).

An old, sick dolphin died in a health assessment research project during 2002, the first such loss during capture-release research conducted over a 32 year period on Florida's west coast.

### STATUS OF STOCK

The status of these stocks relative to OSP is unknown and this species is not listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. The occurrence of 6 anomalous mortality events among bottlenose

dolphins along the U.S. Gulf of Mexico coast since 1990 (NMFS unpublished data) is cause for concern; however, the effects of the mortality events on stock abundance have not yet been determined.

The relatively high number of bottlenose dolphin deaths which occurred during the mortality events since 1990 suggests that some of these stocks may be stressed. Human-caused mortality and serious injury for each of these stocks is not known, but considering the evidence from stranding data (Table 2), the total human-caused mortality and serious injury exceeds 10% of the total known PBR or previous PBR, and, therefore, it is probably not insignificant and approaching the zero mortality and serious injury rate. For these reasons, each of these stocks is a strategic stock.

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## BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN (*Tursiops truncatus*): Northern Gulf of Mexico Coastal Stocks

### STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

Bottlenose dolphins inhabit coastal waters throughout the northern Gulf of Mexico (Mullin *et al.* 1990). Northern Gulf of Mexico coastal waters have been divided for management purposes into 3 bottlenose dolphin stocks: eastern, northern and western. As a working hypothesis, it is assumed that the dolphins occupying habitats with dissimilar climactic, coastal and oceanographic characteristics might be restricted in their movements between habitats, and thus constitute separate stocks. Coastal waters are defined as those from shore, barrier islands, or presumed bay boundaries to the 20m isobath (Figure 1). The eastern coastal bottlenose dolphin stock area extends from 84° W longitude to Key West, Florida; the northern coastal bottlenose dolphin stock area from 84° W longitude to the Mississippi River Delta; and the western coastal bottlenose dolphin stock area from the Mississippi River Delta to the Texas-Mexico border. The eastern coastal stock area is temperate to subtropical in climate, is bordered by a mixture of coastal marshes, sand beaches, marsh and mangrove islands, and has an intermediate level of freshwater input. The northern coastal stock area is characterized by a temperate climate, barrier islands, sand beaches, coastal marshes and marsh islands, and has a relatively high level of fresh water input. The western coastal stock area is characterized by an arid to temperate climate, sand beaches in southern Texas, extensive coastal marshes in northern Texas and Louisiana, and low to high levels of fresh water input.

Portions of the coastal stocks may co-occur with the northern Gulf of Mexico continental shelf stock and bay, sound and estuary stocks, and the western coastal stock is trans-boundary with Mexico. The seaward boundary for coastal stocks, the 20m isobath, generally corresponds to survey strata (Scott *et al.* 1990; Blaylock and Hoggard 1994;

Fulling *et al.* 2003), and thus represents a management boundary rather than an ecological boundary. Both “coastal/nearshore” and “offshore” ecotypes of bottlenose dolphins (Hersh and Duffield 1990) occur in the Gulf of Mexico (LeDuc and Curry 1998), and both could potentially occur in coastal waters. The offshore and coastal ecotypes are genetically distinct using both mitochondrial and nuclear markers (Hoelzel *et al.* 1998). In the northwestern Atlantic Ocean, Torres *et al.* (2003) found a statistically significant break in the distribution of the ecotypes at 34km from shore. The offshore ecotype was found exclusively seaward of 34km and in waters deeper than 34m. Within 7.5km of shore, all animals were of the coastal ecotype. The distance of the 20m isobath ranges from 4 to 90km from shore in the northern Gulf. However, because the continental shelf is much wider in the Gulf, results from the Atlantic may not apply. About 180 genetic samples are available to help assess whether the continental shelf and coastal stocks should be separated, and if so, where. Analysis of these samples is scheduled for 2005-06. Research on coastal stocks is limited. Sellas (2002) found significant genetic differentiation between Sarasota Bay resident dolphins and those occurring primarily in adjacent Gulf coastal waters. Fazioli and Wells (1999) conducted photo-identification surveys of coastal waters off Sarasota Bay over 14 months. They found coastal waters were inhabited by both ‘inshore’ and ‘Gulf’ dolphins but that the 2 types used coastal waters differently. While they found a mixture of ranging patterns (seasonal residency, transience), they did find some dolphins displayed many of the community structure characteristics of inshore dolphins. Similar findings were reported by Quintana-Rizzo and Wells (2001) for coastal waters of Cedar Key, Florida. Off Galveston, Texas, Beier (2001) reported an open population of individual dolphins in coastal waters, but several individual dolphins had been sighted previously by other researchers over a 10-year period. Some coastal animals may move relatively long distances alongshore. Two bottlenose dolphins previously seen in the South Padre Island area in Texas were seen in Matagorda Bay, 285km north, in May 1992 and May 1993 (Lynn 1995).

### POPULATION SIZE

Population size has not been estimated for the 3 coastal stocks for more than 8 years and therefore the current population size is unknown for each (Wade and Angliss 1997). Previous estimates of abundance were

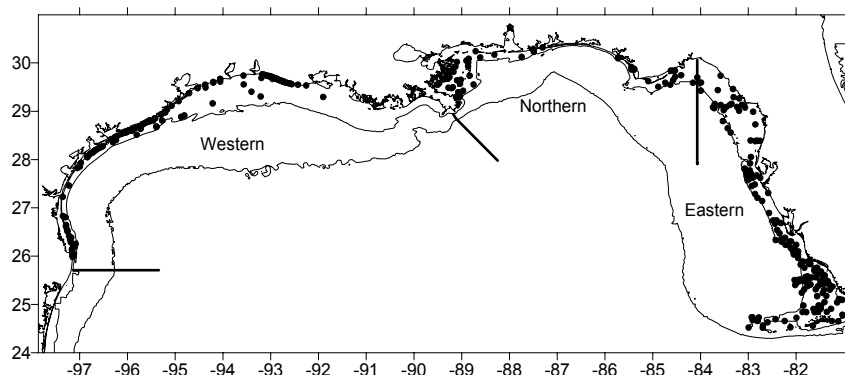


Figure 1. Locations of bottlenose dolphin groups sighted in coastal waters during aerial surveys in 1992-1994. The 20 and 200m isobaths are shown.

derived using distance sampling analysis (Buckland *et al.* 1993) and the computer program DISTANCE (Laake *et al.* 1993) with sighting data collected during aerial line-transect surveys conducted during autumn from 1992-1994 (Blaylock and Hoggard 1994; NMFS unpublished data). Systematic sampling transects, placed randomly with respect to the bottlenose dolphin distribution, extended orthogonally from shore out to approximately 9km past the 18-m isobath. Approximately 5% of the total survey area was visually searched. Previous bottlenose dolphin abundance estimates for each stock based on the 1991-1994 surveys are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Previous bottlenose dolphin abundance ( $N_{BEST}$ ), coefficient of variation (CV), and minimum population estimate ( $N_{MIN}$ ) for northern Gulf of Mexico coastal bottlenose dolphin stocks. Because they are based on data collected more than 8 years ago, all estimates are currently considered unknown. PBR - Potential Biological Removal, UNK - unknown.

Gulf of Mexico Stock Area	$N_{BEST}$	CV	$N_{MIN}$	PBR	Year
Eastern	9,912	0.12	8,963	UNK	1994
Northern	4,191	0.21	3,518	UNK	1993
Western	3,499	0.21	2,938	UNK	1992

#### Minimum Population Estimate

The current minimum population size for each stock is unknown. The previous minimum population estimates for each stock based on the 1992-1994 surveys are listed in Table 1. The minimum population estimate is the lower limit of the two-tailed 60% confidence interval of the log-normally distributed abundance estimate. This is equivalent to the 20th percentile of the log-normal distribution as specified by Wade and Angliss (1997).

#### Current Population Trend

There are insufficient data to determine population trends for these stocks.

#### CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES

Current and maximum net productivity rates are not known for these stocks. The maximum net productivity rate was assumed to be 0.04. This value is based on theoretical modeling showing that cetacean populations may not grow at rates much greater than 4% given the constraints of their reproductive life history (Barlow *et al.* 1995).

#### POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL

Potential Biological Removal (PBR) is currently unknown for each stock. PBR is the product of minimum population size, one-half the maximum productivity rate and a “recovery” factor (Wade and Angliss 1997). The “recovery” factor, which accounts for endangered, depleted and threatened stocks, or stocks of unknown status relative to optimum sustainable population (OSP) is assumed to be 0.5 because the stocks are of unknown status.

#### ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY

A total of 1,377 bottlenose dolphins were found stranded in the northern Gulf of Mexico from 1999 through 2003 (Table 2) (NMFS unpublished data). Of these, 73 or 5% showed evidence of human interactions as the cause of death (e.g., gear entanglement, mutilation, gunshot wounds). Bottlenose dolphin are known to become entangled in recreational and commercial fishing gear (Wells and Scott 1994; Wells *et al.* 1998; Gorzelany 1998), and some are struck by recreational and commercial vessels (Wells and Scott 1997).

There are a number of difficulties associated with the interpretation of stranding data. It is possible that some or all of the stranded dolphins may have been from a nearby bay, sound and estuary stock; however, the proportion of stranded dolphins belonging to another stock cannot be determined because of the difficulty of determining from where the stranded carcass originated. Stranding data probably underestimate the extent of human-related mortality and serious injury because not all of the dolphins which die or are seriously injured due to human interactions wash ashore, nor will all of those that do wash ashore necessarily show signs of fishery-interaction or other human interactions. Finally, the level of technical expertise among stranding network personnel varies widely as does the ability to recognize signs of human interaction, and the condition of the carcass if badly decomposed can inhibit the interpretation of cause of death.

The Gulf of Mexico menhaden fishery was observed to take 9 bottlenose dolphins (3 fatally) between 1992 and 1995 (NMFS unpublished data). During that period, there were 1,366 sets observed out of 26,097 total sets, which if extrapolated for all years suggests that as many as 172 bottlenose dolphins could have been taken in this fishery with up to 57 animals killed. Without an observer program it is not possible to obtain statistically reliable information for this fishery on the number of sets annually, the incidental take and mortality rates, and the communities from which bottlenose dolphins are being taken.

Feeding or provisioning, and swimming with wild bottlenose dolphins have been documented in Florida, particularly near Panama City Beach in the Panhandle. Feeding wild dolphins is defined under the MMPA as a form of “take” because it can alter their natural behavior and increase their risk of injury or death. Nevertheless, Samuels

and Bejder (2004) observed a high rate of uncontrolled provisioning near Panama City beach in 1998. The effects of swim-with activities on dolphins and their legality under the MMPA are less clear and are currently under review. Near Panama City Beach, Samuels and Bejder (2004) concluded that dolphins were amenable to swimmers due to provisioning.

Table 2. Bottlenose dolphin strandings in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico (West Florida to Texas) from 1999 to 2003. Data are from the Southeast Marine Mammal Stranding Database (SESUS). Percent of animals with human interactions were calculated based on animals which were determined as “yes” or “no” for human interactions. Animals that were “CBD” (could not be determined) were excluded from % with human interactions calculations.

State		1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	Total
Florida	No. Stranded	156	130	57	82 <sup>1</sup>	64 <sup>4</sup>	483
	No. Human Interactions	5	8	2	6	7	28
	No. CBD	106	76	26	44	34	286
	% With Human Interactions	10%	15%	6%	16%	23%	14%
Alabama	No. Stranded	12	15	17	12	7	63
	No. Human Interactions	0	0	2	0	1	3
	No. CBD	8	7	8	9	4	36
	% With Human Interactions	0%	0%	22%	0%	33%	11%
Mississippi	No. Stranded	25	27	22	21 <sup>2</sup>	37 <sup>5</sup>	126
	No. Human Interactions	0	1	0	0	0	1
	No. CBD	17	15	8	6	29	75
	% With Human Interactions	0%	8%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Louisiana	No. Stranded	25	14	0	2	33 <sup>6</sup>	69
	No. Human Interactions	1	0	-	0	0	1
	No. CBD	19	14	-	2	29	64
	% With Human Interactions	17%	CBD	-	CBD	0%	20%
Texas	No. Stranded	102	113	116	154 <sup>3</sup>	154 <sup>7</sup>	636
	No. Human Interactions	2	7	6	15	10	40
	No. CBD	40	47	5	57	101	250
	% With Human Interactions	3%	11%	5%	15%	19%	10%
Totals	No. Stranded	320	299	212	271	295	1377
	No. Human Interactions	8	16	10	21	18	73
	No. CBD	190	159	47	118	197	711
	% With Human Interactions	6%	11%	6%	14%	18%	11%

<sup>1</sup> Florida mass stranding of 2 animals in December 2002

<sup>2</sup> Mississippi mass stranding of 2 animals in March 2002

<sup>3</sup> Texas mass strandings (2 animals in January 2002, 2 animals in March 2002)

<sup>4</sup> Florida mass stranding of 2 animals in May 2003

<sup>5</sup> Mississippi mass stranding of 2 animals in April 2003

<sup>6</sup> Louisiana mass stranding of 3 animals in July 2003

<sup>7</sup> Texas mass stranding of 5 animals in March 2003

### Fisheries Information

The commercial fisheries which potentially could interact with coastal stocks in the northern Gulf of Mexico are the shrimp trawl, blue crab trap/pot, stone crab trap/pot, menhaden and gillnet fisheries (Appendix I). Historically, there have been very low numbers of incidental mortality or injury in the stocks associated with the



shrimp trawl fishery. Bottlenose dolphins have been reported stranded with polypropylene rope around their flukes (NMFS 1991; McFee and Brooks, Jr. 1998; NMFS unpublished data), indicating the possibility of entanglement with crab pot lines. The blue crab fishery has not been monitored by observers and there are no estimates of bottlenose dolphin mortality or serious injury for this fishery. There is no observer program data for the menhaden fishery but incidental mortality of bottlenose dolphins has been reported for this fishery (Reynolds 1985). No marine mammal mortalities associated with gillnet fisheries have been reported, but stranding data suggest that gillnet and marine mammal interaction does occur, causing mortality and serious injury.

### Other Mortality

The nearshore habitat occupied by these 3 stocks is adjacent to areas of high human population and in some areas, such as the Tampa Bay, Florida; Galveston, Texas; and Mobile, Alabama, is highly industrialized. Concentrations of anthropogenic chemicals such as PCB's and DDT and its metabolites vary from site to site, and can reach levels of concern for bottlenose dolphin health and reproduction in the southeastern U.S. (Schwacke *et al.* 2002). PCB concentrations in 3 stranded dolphins sampled from the eastern coastal stock area ranged from 16-46 µg/g wet weight. Two stranded dolphins from the northern coastal stock area had the highest levels of DDT derivatives of any of the bottlenose dolphin liver samples analyzed in conjunction with a 1990 mortality investigation conducted by NMFS (Varanasi *et al.* 1992). The significance of these findings are unclear, but there is some evidence that increased exposure to anthropogenic compounds may reduce immune function in bottlenose dolphins (Lahvis *et al.* 1995). Concentrations of chlorinated hydrocarbons and metals were relatively low in most of the bottlenose dolphins examined in conjunction with an anomalous mortality event in Texas bays in 1990; however, some had concentrations at levels of possible toxicological concern (Varanasi *et al.* 1992). Agricultural runoff following periods of high rainfall in 1992 was implicated in a high level of bottlenose dolphin mortalities in Matagorda Bay, which is adjacent to the western coastal stock area (NMFS unpublished data).

The Mississippi River, which drains about two-thirds of the continental U.S., flows into the north-central Gulf of Mexico and deposits its nutrient load which is linked to the formation of 1 of the world's largest areas of seasonal hypoxia (Rabalais *et al.* 1999). This area is located in Louisiana coastal waters west of the Mississippi River delta. How it affects bottlenose dolphins is not known.

Since 1990, there have been 6 bottlenose dolphin die-offs in the northern Gulf of Mexico. From January through May 1990, a total of 367 bottlenose dolphins stranded in the northern Gulf of Mexico. Overall this represented a two-fold increase in the prior maximum recorded strandings for the same period, but in some locations (i.e., Alabama) strandings were 10 times the average number. The cause of the 1990 mortality event could not be determined (Hansen 1992). In March and April 1992, 111 bottlenose dolphins stranded in Texas; about 9 times the average number. Seven of 34 live-captured bottlenose dolphins (20%) in 1992 from Matagorda Bay, Texas, tested positive for previous exposure to cetacean morbillivirus and it is possible that other stocks have been exposed to the morbillivirus (Duignan *et al.* 1996).

In 1992, NOAA Fisheries' Working Group on Unusual Marine Mortality Events was formalized and developed protocols to declare Unusual Mortality Events (UME) and respond to them. Since 1992, 4 UMEs involving bottlenose dolphins have been investigated in the northern Gulf of Mexico. In 1993-1994 a UME of bottlenose dolphins caused by morbillivirus started in the Florida Panhandle and spread west with most of the mortalities occurring in Texas (Lipscomb 1993; Lipscomb *et al.* 1994). In 1996 a UME was declared for bottlenose dolphins in Mississippi and while the cause was not determined, *Karenia brevis* (red tide) was suspected. Between August 1999 and February 2000, at least 120 bottlenose dolphins died coincident with *K. brevis* blooms and fish kills in the Florida Panhandle. In March and April 2004, in another Florida Panhandle UME possibly related to *K. brevis* blooms, 107 bottlenose dolphins stranded dead (NOAA Fisheries 2004).

### STATUS OF STOCK

The status of each stock relative to OSP is not known and population trends cannot be determined due to insufficient data. This species is not listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. The total known human-related mortality and serious injury for each stock cannot be assessed relative to PBR because the PBR is unknown for each stock, and therefore cannot be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. Each is a strategic stock because the known level of human-related mortality or serious injury relative to PBR is unknown. Also, there is no systematic monitoring of all fisheries that may take these stocks. Insufficient information is available to determine whether the total fishery mortality and serious injury for coastal bottlenose dolphin stocks is insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. The potential impact, if any, of coastal pollution may be an issue for this species in portions of its habitat, though little is known on this to date.

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## BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN (*Tursiops truncatus*): Northern Gulf of Mexico Oceanic Stock

### STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

Thirty-eight stocks have been provisionally identified for Gulf of Mexico bottlenose dolphins (Waring *et al.* 2001). Gulf of Mexico inshore habitat has been separated into 33 bay, sound and estuarine stocks. Three northern Gulf of Mexico coastal stocks include nearshore waters from the shore to the 20m isobath. The continental shelf stock encompasses waters from 20 to 200m deep. The Gulf of Mexico oceanic stock encompasses the waters from the 200m isobath to the seaward extent of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ; Figure 1).

Both “coastal/nearshore” and “offshore” ecotypes of bottlenose dolphins (Hersh and Duffield 1990) occur in the Gulf of Mexico (LeDuc and Curry 1998) but the distribution of each is not known. The offshore and nearshore ecotypes are genetically distinct using both mitochondrial and nuclear markers (Hoelzel *et al.* 1998). In the northwestern Atlantic Ocean, Torres *et al.* (2003) found a statistically significant break in the distribution of the ecotypes at 34km from shore. The offshore ecotype was found exclusively seaward of 34km and in waters deeper than 34m. The continental shelf is much wider in the Gulf of Mexico and these results may not apply.

Based on research currently being conducted on bottlenose dolphins in the Gulf of Mexico, as well as the western North Atlantic Ocean, the structure of these stocks is uncertain, but appears to be complex. The multi-disciplinary research programs conducted over the last 3.5 decades (e.g., Wells 1994) are beginning to shed light on stock structures of bottlenose dolphins, though additional analyses are needed before stock structures can be elaborated on in the Gulf of Mexico. As research is completed, it may be necessary to revise stocks of bottlenose dolphins in the Gulf of Mexico.

### POPULATION SIZE

Estimates of abundance were derived through the application of distance sampling analysis (Buckland *et al.* 2001) and the computer program DISTANCE (Thomas *et al.* 1998) to sighting data. Surveys were conducted during April/May from 1996 to 2001 (excluding 1998) in oceanic waters of the northern Gulf of Mexico, using NOAA ships *Oregon II* (1996, 1997, 1999) and *Gordon Gunter* (2000, 2001). Tracklines, which were perpendicular to the bathymetry, covered the waters from 200m to the offshore extent of the U.S. EEZ. Estimates for all oceanic strata were summed, as survey effort was not uniformly distributed, to calculate a total estimate for the Gulf of Mexico oceanic waters (Figure 1; Mullin and Fulling 2004). Due to limited survey effort in any given year, survey effort was pooled across all years to develop an average abundance estimate.

The estimate of abundance for bottlenose dolphins in oceanic waters, pooled from 1996 to 2001, is 2,239 (CV=0.41) (Mullin and Fulling 2004), which is the best available abundance estimate for this species in the oceanic Gulf of Mexico.

### Minimum Population Estimate

The minimum population estimate is the lower limit of the two-tailed 60% confidence interval of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate. This is equivalent to the 20th percentile of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate as specified by Wade and Angliss (1997). The best estimate of abundance for bottlenose dolphins is 2,239 (CV=0.41) taken from Mullin and Fulling (2004). The minimum population estimate for the northern Gulf of Mexico oceanic stock is 1,607 bottlenose dolphins.

### Current Population Trend

There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this stock.

### CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET

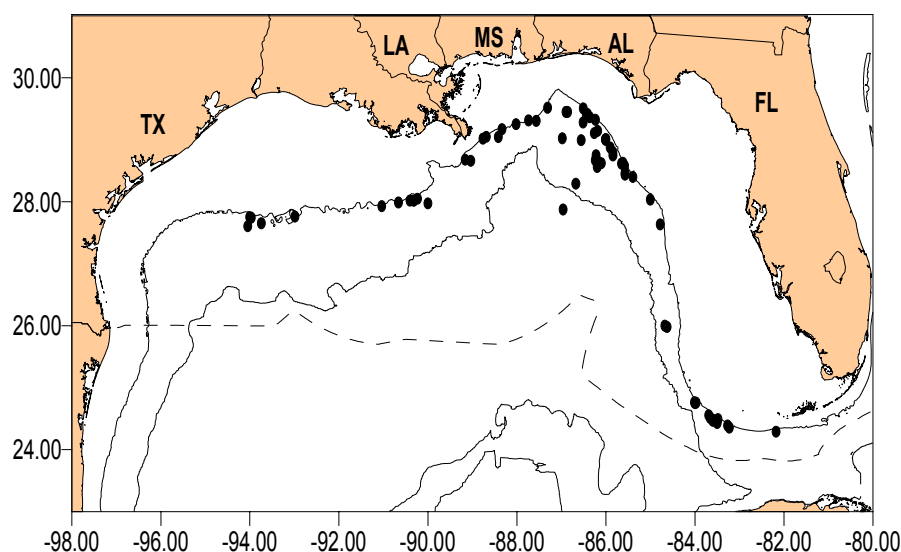


Figure 1. Distribution of bottlenose dolphin sightings from SEFSC shipboard surveys during spring 1996-2001. All the on-effort sightings are shown, though not all were used to estimate abundance. Solid lines indicate the 200m and 2,000m isobaths and the dotted line indicates the offshore extent of the U.S. EEZ.

## PRODUCTIVITY RATES

Current and maximum productivity rates are unknown for this stock. For purposes of this assessment, the maximum productivity rate was assumed to be 0.04. This value is based on theoretical modeling showing that cetacean populations may not grow at rates much greater than 4% given the constraints of their reproductive life history (Barlow *et al.* 1995).

## POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL

Potential biological removal level (PBR) is the product of minimum population size, one-half the maximum productivity rate and a recovery factor (MMPA Sec. 3. 16 U.S.C. 1362; Wade and Angliss 1997). The minimum population size is 1,607 (CV=0.41). The maximum productivity rate is 0.04, the default value for cetaceans. The “recovery” factor, which accounts for endangered, depleted, threatened stocks, or stocks of unknown status relative to optimum sustainable population (OSP) is assumed to be 0.5 because the stock is of unknown status. PBR for the Gulf of Mexico oceanic bottlenose dolphin is 16.

## ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY

Annual human-caused mortality and serious injury is unknown for this stock.

## Fisheries Information

The level of past or current, direct, human-caused mortality of bottlenose dolphins in the Gulf of Mexico is unknown; however, interactions between bottlenose dolphins and fisheries have been observed in the Gulf of Mexico. There have been no reports of incidental mortality or injury associated with the shrimp trawl fishery in this area. Pelagic swordfish, tunas and billfish are the targets of the longline fishery operating in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. There were no reports of mortality or serious injury to bottlenose dolphins in the Gulf of Mexico during 1998-2003 (Yeung 1999; Yeung 2001; Garrison 2003; Garrison and Richards 2004). Fishery interactions have previously been reported to occur between bottlenose dolphins and the longline swordfish/tuna fishery in the Gulf of Mexico (SEFSC unpublished logbook data), with annual fishery-related mortality and serious injury to bottlenose dolphins estimated to be 2.8 per year (CV=0.74) during 1992-1993. This could include bottlenose dolphins from the continental shelf and oceanic stocks. One animal was hooked in the mouth and released by pelagic longline fishery in 1998 (Yeung 1999).

A trawl fishery for butterfish was monitored by NMFS observers for a short period in the 1980's with no records of incidental take of marine mammals (Burn and Scott 1988; NMFS unpublished data), although an experimental set by NMFS resulted in the death of 2 bottlenose dolphins (Burn and Scott 1988). There are no other data available with regard to this fishery.

## Other Mortality

The use of explosives to remove oil rigs in portions of the continental shelf in the western Gulf of Mexico has the potential to cause serious injury or mortality to marine mammals. These activities have been closely monitored by NMFS observers since 1987 (Gitschlag and Herczeg 1994). There have been no reports of either serious injury or mortality to bottlenose dolphins in the oceanic Gulf of Mexico (NMFS unpublished data).

## STATUS OF STOCK

The status of bottlenose dolphins, relative to OSP, in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico oceanic waters is unknown. The species is not listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The total fishery-related mortality and serious injury for this stock is unknown, but assumed to be less than 10% of the calculated PBR and can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. This is not a strategic stock because annual fishery-related mortality and serious injury does not exceed PBR.

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## BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN (*Tursiops truncatus*): Northern Gulf of Mexico Continental Shelf Stock

### STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

The Gulf of Mexico continental shelf bottlenose dolphin stock inhabits waters from 20 to 200m deep in the northern Gulf from the U.S.-Mexican border to the Florida Keys (Figure 1). Both “coastal” and “offshore” ecotypes of bottlenose dolphins (Hersh and Duffield 1990) occur in the Gulf of Mexico (LeDuc and Curry 1998). The continental shelf stock probably consists of a mixture of both the coastal and offshore ecotypes. The offshore and nearshore ecotypes are genetically distinct using both mitochondrial and nuclear markers (Hoelzel *et al.* 1998). In the northwestern Atlantic, Torres *et al.* (2003) found a statistically significant break in the distribution of the ecotypes at 34km from shore. The offshore ecotype was found exclusively seaward of 34km and in waters deeper than 34m. Within 7.5km of shore, all animals were of the coastal ecotype. The continental shelf is much wider in the Gulf of Mexico so these results may not apply. The continental shelf stock range may extend into Mexican and Cuban territorial waters; however, there are no available estimates of either abundance or mortality from those countries.

The bottlenose dolphins inhabiting waters <20m deep in the U.S. Gulf are believed to constitute 36 inshore or coastal stocks. An oceanic stock is provisionally defined for bottlenose dolphins inhabiting waters >200m. Both inshore and coastal stocks and the oceanic stock are separate from the continental shelf stock. However, the continental shelf stock may overlap with coastal stocks and the oceanic stock in some areas and may be genetically indistinguishable from those stocks. Analysis of biopsy samples obtained from bottlenose dolphins in the shelf region is scheduled for 2005-06. However, studies have shown significant genetic differentiation between inshore stocks and coastal/continental shelf stocks (Sellas 2002).

Based on research currently being conducted on bottlenose dolphins in the Gulf of Mexico, as well as the western North Atlantic Ocean, the structure of these stocks is uncertain, but appears to be complex. The multi-disciplinary research programs conducted over the last 3.5 decades (e.g., Wells 1994) have begun to shed light on the structure of some of the stocks of bottlenose dolphins, though additional analyses are needed before stock structures can be elaborated on in the Gulf of Mexico. As research is completed, it may be necessary to revise stocks of bottlenose dolphins in the Gulf of Mexico.

### POPULATION SIZE

Estimates of abundance were derived through the application of distance sampling analysis (Buckland *et al.* 2001) and the computer program DISTANCE (Thomas *et al.* 1998) to sighting data. Data were collected from 1998 to 2001 during fall plankton surveys conducted from NOAA ships *Oregon II* (1998, 1999) and *Gordon Gunter* (2000, 2001). Tracklines, which were perpendicular to the bathymetry, covered shelf waters from the 20m to the 200m isobaths (Figure 1, Table 1; Fulling *et al.* 2003). Due to limited survey effort in any given year, survey effort was pooled across all years to develop an average abundance estimate for both areas.

The best abundance estimate of bottlenose dolphins, pooled from 1998 through 2001, for continental shelf vessel surveys was 25,320 (CV=0.26) (Fulling *et al.* 2003). This estimate is considered the best because these surveys have the most complete coverage of the species' habitat.

### Minimum Population Estimate

The minimum population estimate is the lower limit of the two-tailed 60% confidence interval of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate. This is equivalent to the 20th percentile of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate as specified by Wade and Angliss (1997). The best estimate of abundance for bottlenose

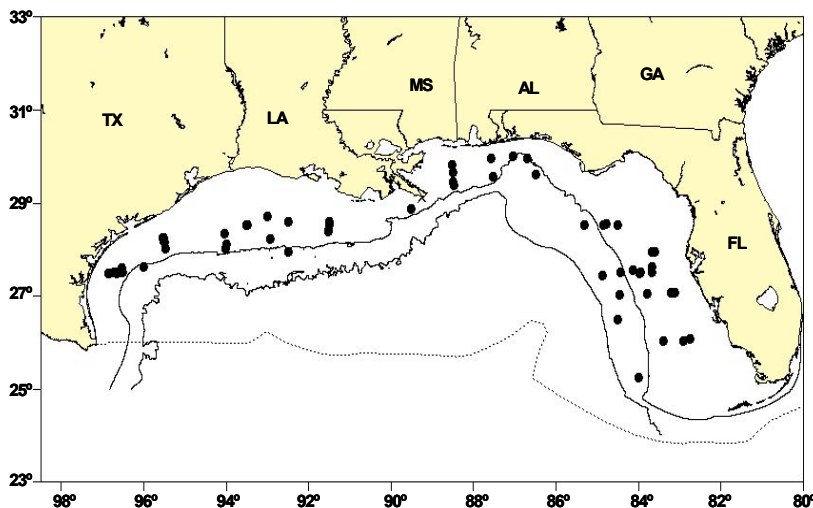


Figure 1. Distribution of bottlenose dolphin sightings from SEFSC fall vessel surveys during 1998-2001. All the on-effort sightings are shown, though not all were used to estimate abundance. Solid lines indicate the 100m and 1,000m isobaths and the dotted line shows the offshore extent of the U.S. EEZ.

dolphins is 25,320 (CV=0.26). The minimum population estimate for the northern Gulf of Mexico is 20,414 bottlenose dolphins.

### **Current Population Trend**

There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The pooled abundance estimate from the 1998-2001 ship survey of 25,320 (CV=0.26) and the previous abundance from a 1992-1994 aerial survey of 50,247 (CV=0.18) (Blaylock and Hoggard 1994) are significantly different ( $P < 0.05$ ). However, there are a number of reasons the 2 estimates are different other than from a change in abundance. Blaylock and Hoggard (1994) estimated from aerial surveys that about 31% of the bottlenose dolphins in shelf waters west of Mobile Bay were in a rather small area from the Mississippi River Delta west to about 90.5°W. Vessel survey effort in this area was small and resulted in only 1 sighting of bottlenose dolphins. Therefore, vessel-based estimates may have underestimated the abundance of bottlenose dolphins in the western shelf. Aerial abundances were based on survey lines that extended from 9.3km past the 18m (10fm) curve to 9.3km past 183m (100fm) curve, so the area surveyed was somewhat different than from the study area (20-200m) for vessel surveys. Also, Atlantic spotted dolphins are very common in shelf waters and are similar in length and shape to bottlenose dolphins. Atlantic spotted dolphins are born without spots and become progressively more spotted with age, but young animals look very similar to bottlenose dolphins. Therefore, depending on the composition of the group, from a distance Atlantic spotted are not always easily distinguished from bottlenose dolphins, so it is possible that some groups were misidentified during aerial surveys leading to bias in the relative abundance of each species.

### **CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES**

Current and maximum net productivity rates are unknown for this stock. For purposes of this assessment, the maximum net productivity rate was assumed to be 0.04. This value is based on theoretical modeling showing that cetacean populations may not grow at rates much greater than 4% given the constraints of their reproductive history (Barlow *et al.* 1995).

### **POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL**

Potential biological removal level (PBR) is the product of the minimum population size, one half the maximum net productivity rate and a “recovery” factor (MMPA Sec. 3.16 U.S.C. 1362; Wade and Angliss 1997). The minimum population size is 20,414 (CV=0.26). The maximum productivity rate is 0.04, the default value for cetaceans. The “recovery” factor, which accounts for endangered, depleted, threatened stocks, or stocks of unknown status relative to optimum sustainable population (OSP) is assumed to be 0.5 because the stock is of unknown status. PBR for the northern Gulf of Mexico continental shelf bottlenose dolphin is 204.

### **ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY**

There are no observed cases of human-caused mortality and serious injury in this stock; however, based on an observed non-lethal take in U.S. Atlantic waters in 1993 in the pelagic longline fishery, this stock may be subject to incidental take resulting in serious injury or mortality. Fishery interactions have been reported to occur between bottlenose dolphins and the longline swordfish/tuna fishery in the Gulf of Mexico (SEFSC unpublished logbook data), and annual fishery-related mortality and serious injury to bottlenose dolphins was estimated to be 2.8 per year (CV=0.74) during 1992-1993. This could include bottlenose dolphins from the oceanic stock. There has been no reported fishing-related mortality of bottlenose dolphins during 1998-2003 (Yeung 1999; Yeung 2001; Garrison 2003; Garrison and Richards 2004).

### **Fisheries Information**

The level of past or current, direct, human-caused mortality of bottlenose dolphins in the northern Gulf of Mexico is unknown; however, interactions between bottlenose dolphins and fisheries have been observed in the northern Gulf of Mexico. There have been no reports of incidental mortality or injury associated with the shrimp trawl fishery in this area. Pelagic swordfish, tunas and billfish are the targets of the longline fishery operating in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. There were no observed incidental takes or releases of bottlenose dolphins in the Gulf of Mexico from 1997 to 2001. A trawl fishery for butterfish was monitored by NMFS observers for a short period in the 1980's with no records of incidental take of marine mammals (Burn and Scott 1988; NMFS unpublished data), although an experimental set by NMFS resulted in the death of 2 bottlenose dolphins (Burn and Scott 1988). There are no other data available.

### **Other Mortality**

The use of explosives to remove oil rigs in portions of the continental shelf in the western Gulf of Mexico has the potential to cause serious injury or mortality to marine mammals. These activities have been closely monitored by NMFS observers since 1987 (Gitschlag and Herczeg 1994). There have been no reports of either serious injury or mortality to bottlenose dolphins (NMFS unpublished data).

### **STATUS OF STOCK**

The status of bottlenose dolphins in the northern Gulf of Mexico, relative to OSP, is unknown. The species is not listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The total fishery-related mortality and serious injury for this stock is



unknown, but assumed to be less than 10% of the calculated PBR and can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. This is not a strategic stock because average annual fishery-related mortality and serious injury does not exceed PBR.

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## **BRYDE'S WHALE (*Balaenoptera edeni*): Northern Gulf of Mexico Stock**

### **STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE**

Bryde's whales are distributed worldwide in tropical and sub-tropical waters. In the western Atlantic Ocean, Bryde's whales are reported from off the southeastern United States and the southern West Indies to Cabo Frio, Brazil (Leatherwood and Reeves 1983). Most of the sighting records of Bryde's whales in the Gulf of Mexico are from NMFS abundance surveys that were conducted during the spring (Figure 1; Hansen *et al.* 1995; Hansen *et al.* 1996; Mullin and Hoggard 2000; Mullin and Fulling 2004). However, there are stranding records from throughout the year (Würsig *et al.* 2000).

It has been postulated that the Bryde's whales found in the Gulf of Mexico may represent a resident stock (Schmidly 1981; Leatherwood and Reeves 1983), but there is no information on stock differentiation. The Gulf of Mexico population is provisionally being considered a separate stock for management purposes, although there is currently no information to differentiate this stock from the Atlantic Ocean stock(s). Additional morphological, genetic and/or behavioral data are needed to provide further information on stock delineation.

### **POPULATION SIZE**

Estimates of abundance were derived through the application of distance sampling analysis (Buckland *et al.* 2001) and the computer program DISTANCE (Thomas *et al.* 1998) to sighting data.

From 1991 through 1994, line-transect vessel surveys were conducted during spring in the northern Gulf of Mexico from the 200m isobath to the seaward extent of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). Survey effort-weighted estimated average abundance of Bryde's whales for all surveys combined from 1991 through 1994 was 35 (CV=1.10) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). As recommended in the GAMMS Workshop Report (Wade and Angliss 1997), estimates older than 8 years are deemed unreliable, and therefore should not be used for PBR determinations.

Similar surveys were conducted during April/May from 1996 to 2001 (excluding 1998) in oceanic waters of the northern Gulf of Mexico, using NOAA ships *Oregon II* (1996, 1997, 1999) and *Gordon Gunter* (2000, 2001). Estimates for all oceanic strata were summed, as survey effort was not uniformly distributed, to calculate a total estimate for the entire northern Gulf of Mexico oceanic waters (Figure 1; Mullin and Fulling 2004). Due to limited survey effort in any given year, survey effort was pooled across all years to develop an average abundance estimate.

The estimate of abundance for Bryde's whales in oceanic waters, pooled from 1996 to 2001, is 40 (CV=0.61) (Mullin and Fulling 2004), which is the best available abundance estimate for this species in the northern Gulf of Mexico.

### **Minimum Population Estimate**

The minimum population estimate is the lower limit of the two-tailed 60% confidence interval of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate. This is equivalent to the 20th percentile of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate as specified by Wade and Angliss (1997). The best estimate of abundance for Bryde's whales is

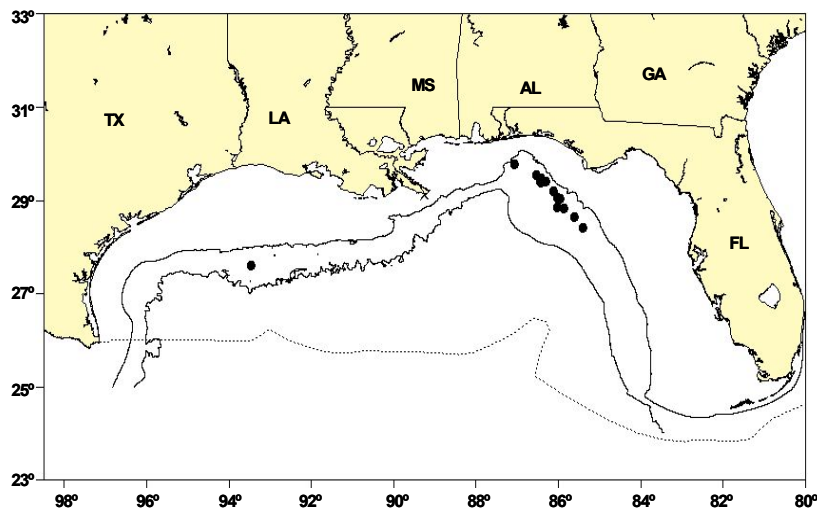


Figure 1. Distribution of Bryde's whale sightings from SEFSC spring vessel surveys during 1996-2001. All the on-effort sightings are shown, though not all were used to estimate abundance. Solid lines indicate the 100m and 1,000m isobaths and the dotted line indicates the offshore extent of the U.S. EEZ.

40 (CV=0.61). The minimum population estimate for the northern Gulf of Mexico is 25 Bryde's whales.

### **Current Population Trend**

There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The pooled abundance estimate for 1996-2001 of 40 (CV=0.61) and that for 1991-1994 of 35 (CV=1.09) are not significantly different ( $P>0.05$ ), but due to the precision of the estimates, the power to detect a difference is low.

### **CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES**

Current and maximum net productivity rates are unknown for this stock. For purposes of this assessment, the maximum net productivity rate was assumed to be 0.04. This value is based on theoretical modeling showing that cetacean populations may not grow at rates much greater than 4% given the constraints of their reproductive history (Barlow *et al.* 1995).

### **POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL**

Potential biological removal level (PBR) is the product of the minimum population size, one half the maximum net productivity rate and a recovery factor (MMPA Sec. 3.16 U.S.C. 1362; Wade and Angliss 1997). The minimum population size is 25. The maximum productivity rate is 0.04, the default value for cetaceans. The "recovery" factor, which accounts for endangered, depleted, threatened stocks, or stocks of unknown status relative to optimum sustainable population (OSP), is assumed to be 0.5 because the stock is of unknown status. PBR for the northern Gulf of Mexico Bryde's whale is 0.3.

### **ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY**

There has been no reported fishing-related mortality of Bryde's whales during 1998-2003 (Yeung 1999; Yeung 2001; Garrison 2003; Garrison and Richards 2004).

### **Fisheries Information**

The level of past or current, direct, human-caused mortality of Bryde's whales in the northern Gulf of Mexico is unknown. Pelagic swordfish, tunas and billfish are the targets of the longline fishery operating in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. There were no reports of mortality or serious injury to Bryde's whales by this fishery.

### **Other Mortality**

There were no reported strandings of Bryde's whales in the Gulf of Mexico during 1999-2003. Stranding data probably underestimate the extent of fishery-related mortality and serious injury because not all of the marine mammals which die or are seriously injured in fishery interactions wash ashore, not all that wash ashore are discovered, reported or investigated, nor will all of those that do wash ashore necessarily show signs of entanglement or other fishery-interaction. Finally, the level of technical expertise among stranding network personnel varies widely as does the ability to recognize signs of fishery interactions.

### **STATUS OF STOCK**

The status of Bryde's whales in the northern Gulf of Mexico, relative to OSP, is unknown. The species is not listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The total fishery-related mortality and serious injury for this stock is unknown, but assumed to be less than 10% of the calculated PBR and can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. This is not a strategic stock because average annual fishery-related mortality and serious injury does not exceed PBR.

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## CLYMENE DOLPHIN (*Stenella clymene*): Northern Gulf of Mexico Stock

### STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

The Clymene dolphin is endemic to tropical and sub-tropical waters of the Atlantic (Leatherwood and Reeves 1983; Perrin and Mead 1994). Sightings of these animals in the northern Gulf of Mexico occur primarily over the deeper waters off the continental shelf (Mullin *et al.* 1994). Clymene dolphins were seen in the winter, spring and summer during GulfCet aerial surveys of the northern Gulf of Mexico during 1992 to 1998 (Hansen *et al.* 1996; Mullin and Hoggard 2000).

The Gulf of Mexico population is provisionally being considered a separate stock for management purposes, although there is currently no information to differentiate this stock from the Atlantic Ocean stock(s). Additional morphological, genetic and/or behavioral data are needed to provide further information on stock delineation.

### POPULATION SIZE

Estimates of abundance were derived through the application of distance sampling analysis (Buckland *et al.* 2001) and the computer program DISTANCE (Thomas *et al.* 1998) to sighting data. From 1991 through 1994, line-transect vessel surveys were conducted during spring in the northern Gulf of Mexico from the 200m isobath to the seaward extent of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). Survey effort-weighted estimated average abundance of Clymene dolphins for all surveys combined was 5,571 (CV=0.37) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). As recommended in the GAMMS Workshop Report (Wade and Angliss 1997), estimates older than 8 years are deemed unreliable, and therefore should not be used for PBR determinations.

Similar surveys were conducted during April/May from 1996 to 2001 (excluding 1998) in oceanic waters of the northern Gulf of Mexico, using NOAA ships *Oregon II* (1996, 1997, 1999) and *Gordon Gunter* (2000, 2001). Estimates for all oceanic strata were summed, as survey effort was not uniformly distributed, to calculate a total estimate for the entire northern Gulf of Mexico oceanic waters (Figure 1; Mullin and Fulling 2004). Due to limited survey effort in any given year, survey effort was pooled across all years to develop an average abundance estimate.

The estimate of abundance for Clymene dolphins in oceanic waters, pooled from 1996 to 2001, is 17,355 (CV=0.65) (Mullin and Fulling 2004), which is the best available abundance estimate for this species in the northern Gulf of Mexico.

### Minimum Population Estimate

The minimum population estimate is the lower limit of the two-tailed 60% confidence interval of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate. This is equivalent to the 20th percentile of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate as specified by Wade and Angliss (1997). The best estimate of abundance for Clymene's

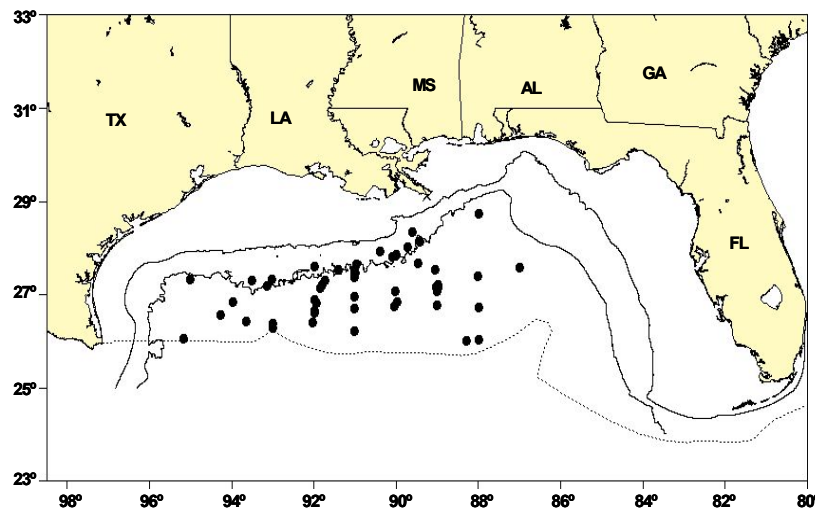


Figure 1. Distribution of Clymene dolphin sightings from SEFSC shipboard spring surveys during 1996-2001. All the on-effort sightings are shown, though not all were used to estimate abundance. Solid lines indicate the 100m and 1,000m isobaths and the dotted line indicates the offshore extent of the U.S. EEZ.

dolphins is 17,355 (CV=0.65). The minimum population estimate for the northern Gulf of Mexico is 10,528 Clymene dolphins.

### **Current Population Trend**

There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The pooled abundance estimate for 1996-2001 of 17,355 (CV=0.65) and that for 1991-1994 of 5,571 (CV=0.37) are not significantly different ( $P>0.05$ ), but due to the precision of the estimates, the power to detect a difference is low.

### **CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES**

Current and maximum net productivity rates are unknown for this stock. For purposes of this assessment, the maximum net productivity rate was assumed to be 0.04. This value is based on theoretical modeling showing that cetacean populations may not grow at rates much greater than 4% given the constraints of their reproductive history (Barlow *et al.* 1995).

### **POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL**

Potential biological removal level (PBR) is the product of the minimum population size, one half the maximum net productivity rate and a recovery factor (MMPA Sec. 3.16 U.S.C. 1362; Wade and Angliss 1997). The minimum population size is 10,528 (CV=0.65). The maximum productivity rate is 0.04, the default value for cetaceans. The “recovery” factor, which accounts for endangered, depleted, threatened stocks, or stocks of unknown status relative to optimum sustainable population (OSP), is assumed to be 0.5 because the stock is of unknown status. PBR for the northern Gulf of Mexico Clymene dolphin is 105.

### **ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY**

There has been no reported fishing-related mortality of Clymene dolphins during 1998-2003 (Yeung 1999; Yeung 2001; Garrison 2003; Garrison and Richards 2004).

### **Fisheries Information**

The level of past or current, direct, human-caused mortality of Clymene dolphins in the northern Gulf of Mexico is unknown. Pelagic swordfish, tunas and billfish are the targets of the longline fishery operating in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. There were no reports of mortality or serious injury to Clymene dolphins by this fishery.

### **Other Mortality**

There were 2 reported stranding events of Clymene dolphins in the Gulf of Mexico during 1999-2003. One animal stranded in Florida in July 2002, and 2 animals mass stranded in Louisiana in September 2003. There were no indications of human interactions for these stranded animals. Stranding data probably underestimate the extent of fishery-related mortality and serious injury because not all of the marine mammals which die or are seriously injured in fishery interactions wash ashore, not all that wash ashore are discovered, reported or investigated, nor will all of those that do wash ashore necessarily show signs of entanglement or other fishery-interaction. Finally, the level of technical expertise among stranding network personnel varies widely as does the ability to recognize signs of fishery interactions.

### **STATUS OF STOCK**

The status of Clymene dolphins in the northern Gulf of Mexico, relative to OSP, is unknown. The species is not listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The total fishery-related mortality and serious injury for this stock is unknown, but assumed to be less than 10% of the calculated PBR and can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. This is not a strategic stock because average annual fishery-related mortality and serious injury does not exceed PBR.

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## DWARF SPERM WHALE (*Kogia sima*): Northern Gulf of Mexico Stock

### STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

The dwarf sperm whale appears to be distributed worldwide in temperate to tropical waters (Caldwell and Caldwell 1989). Sightings of these animals in the northern Gulf of Mexico occur primarily in oceanic waters (Figure 1; Mullin *et al.* 1991; Mullin and Fulling 2004). Dwarf sperm whales and pygmy sperm whales (*Kogia breviceps*) are difficult to differentiate at sea, and sightings of either species are usually categorized as *Kogia* spp. Sightings of this category were documented in all seasons during GulfCet aerial surveys of the northern Gulf of Mexico from 1992 to 1998 (Hansen *et al.* 1996; Mullin and Hoggard 2000). The difficulty in sighting dwarf and pygmy sperm whales may be exacerbated by their avoidance reaction towards ships, and change in behavior towards approaching survey aircraft (Würsig *et al.* 1998).

In a study using hematological and stable-isotope data, Barros *et al.* (1998) speculated that dwarf sperm whales may have a more pelagic distribution than pygmy sperm whales and/or dive deeper during feeding bouts. The Gulf of Mexico population is provisionally being considered a separate stock for management purposes, although there is currently no information to differentiate this stock from the Atlantic Ocean stock(s). Additional morphological, genetic and/or behavioral data are needed to provide further information on stock delineation.

### POPULATION SIZE

Estimates of abundance were derived through the application of distance sampling analysis (Buckland *et al.* 2001) and the computer program DISTANCE (Thomas *et al.* 1998) to sighting data. From 1991 through 1994, line-transect vessel surveys were conducted during spring in the northern Gulf of Mexico from the 200m isobath to the seaward extent of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). Survey effort-weighted estimated average abundance of dwarf and pygmy sperm whales for all surveys combined was 547 (CV = 0.28) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). As recommended in the GAMMS Workshop Report (Wade and Angliss 1997), estimates older than 8 years are deemed unreliable, and therefore should not be used for PBR determinations.

Similar surveys were conducted during April/May from 1996 to 2001 (excluding 1998) in oceanic waters of the northern Gulf of Mexico, using NOAA ships *Oregon II* (1996, 1997, 1999) and *Gordon Gunter* (2000, 2001). Estimates for all oceanic strata were summed, as survey effort was not uniformly distributed, to calculate a total estimate for the entire northern Gulf of Mexico oceanic waters (Figure 1; Mullin and Fulling 2004). Due to limited survey effort in any given year, survey effort was pooled across all years to develop an average abundance estimate.

The estimate of abundance for dwarf and pygmy sperm whales in oceanic waters, pooled from 1996 to 2001, is 742 (CV=0.29) (Mullin and Fulling 2004), which is the best available abundance estimate for these species in the northern Gulf of Mexico. A separate estimate of abundance for dwarf sperm whales cannot be estimated due to uncertainty of species identification at sea.

### Minimum Population Estimate

The minimum population estimate is the lower limit of the two-tailed 60% confidence interval of the log-

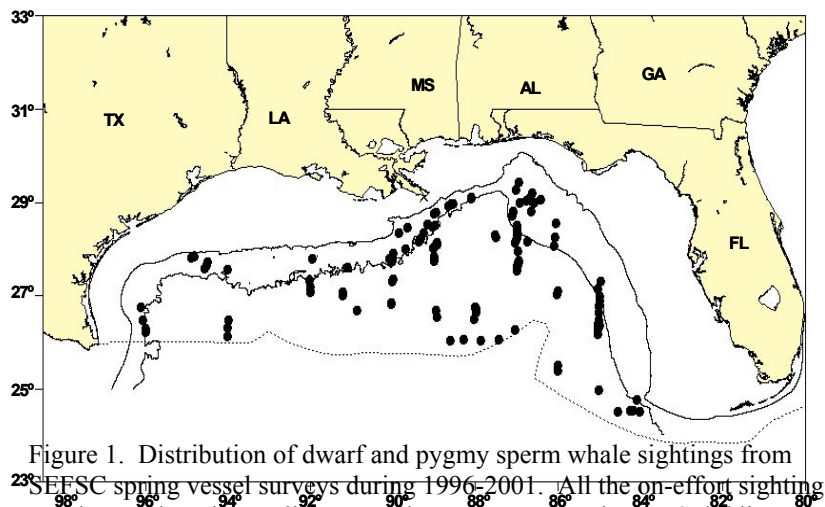


Figure 1. Distribution of dwarf and pygmy sperm whale sightings from SEFSC spring vessel surveys during 1996-2001. All the on-effort sightings are shown, though not all were used to estimate abundance. Solid lines indicate the 100m and 1,000m isobaths and the dotted line indicates the offshore extent of the U.S. EEZ.



normal distributed abundance estimate. This is equivalent to the 20th percentile of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate as specified by Wade and Angliss (1997). The best estimate of abundance for dwarf and pygmy sperm whales is 742 (CV=0.29). It is not possible to determine the minimum population estimate for only dwarf sperm whales. The minimum population estimate for the northern Gulf of Mexico is 584 dwarf and pygmy sperm whales.

#### **Current Population Trend**

There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species.

#### **CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES**

Current and maximum net productivity rates are unknown for this stock. For purposes of this assessment, the maximum net productivity rate was assumed to be 0.04. This value is based on theoretical modeling showing that cetacean populations may not grow at rates much greater than 4% given the constraints of their reproductive history (Barlow *et al.* 1995).

#### **POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL**

Potential biological removal level (PBR) is the product of the minimum population size, one half the maximum net productivity rate and a recovery factor (MMPA Sec. 3.16 U.S.C. 1362; Wade and Angliss 1997). The minimum population size for dwarf and pygmy sperm whales is 574 (CV=0.29). The maximum productivity rate is 0.04, the default value for cetaceans. The “recovery” factor, which accounts for endangered, depleted, threatened stocks, or stocks of unknown status relative to optimum sustainable population (OPS), is assumed to be 0.5 because the stock is of unknown status. PBR for the northern Gulf of Mexico dwarf and pygmy sperm whales is 5.8. It is not possible to determine the PBR for only dwarf sperm whales.

#### **ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY**

There has been no reported fishing-related mortality of dwarf or pygmy sperm whales during 1998-2003 (Yeung 1999; Yeung 2001; Garrison 2003; Garrison and Richards 2004).

#### **Fisheries Information**

The level of past or current, direct, human-caused mortality of dwarf sperm whales in the northern Gulf of Mexico is unknown. Pelagic swordfish, tunas and billfish are the targets of the longline fishery operating in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. There were no reports of mortality or serious injury to dwarf sperm whales by this fishery.

#### **Other Mortality**

There were no documented strandings of dwarf sperm whales in the northern Gulf of Mexico during 1999-2003 which were classified as likely caused by fishery interactions, but there have been stranding investigation reports of dwarf sperm whales which may have died as a result of other human-related causes. At least 7 dwarf sperm whale strandings were documented in the northern Gulf of Mexico from 1999 through 2003 (Table 1). An additional 5 *Kogia* spp. stranded during this same period. Stranding data probably underestimate the extent of fishery-related mortality and serious injury because not all of the marine mammals which die or are seriously injured in fishery interactions wash ashore, not all that wash ashore are discovered, reported or investigated, nor will all of those that do wash ashore necessarily show signs of entanglement or other fishery-interaction. Finally, the level of technical expertise among stranding network personnel varies widely as does the ability to recognize signs of fishery interactions.

Table 1. Dwarf sperm whale (*Kogia sima*) strandings along the U.S. Gulf of Mexico coast, 1999-2003.

State	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	TOTAL
Alabama	0	0	0	0	0	0
Florida	0	2	0	3	1	6
Louisiana	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mississippi	0	0	0	0	0	0
Texas	0	0	0	1	0	1
<b>Total</b>	0	2	0	4	1	7

## STATUS OF STOCK

The status of dwarf sperm whales in the northern Gulf of Mexico, relative to OSP, is unknown. The species is not listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The total fishery-related mortality and serious injury for this stock is unknown, but assumed to be less than 10% of the calculated PBR and can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. This is not a strategic stock because average annual fishery-related mortality and serious injury does not exceed PBR.

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## FALSE KILLER WHALE (*Pseudorca crassidens*): Northern Gulf of Mexico Stock

### STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

The false killer whale is distributed worldwide throughout warm temperate and tropical oceans (Leatherwood and Reeves 1983). Sightings of this species in the northern Gulf of Mexico occur in oceanic waters (Figure 1; Mullin and Fulling 2004). False killer whales were seen only in the spring and summer during GulfCet aerial surveys of the northern Gulf of Mexico between 1992 and 1998 (Hansen *et al.* 1996; Mullin and Hoggard 2000) and in the spring during vessel surveys (Mullin and Fulling 2004).

The Gulf of Mexico population is provisionally being considered 1 stock for management purposes, although there is currently no information to differentiate this stock from the Atlantic Ocean stock(s). Additional morphological, genetic and/or behavioral data are needed to provide further information on stock delineation.

### POPULATION SIZE

Estimates of abundance were derived through the application of distance sampling analysis (Buckland *et al.* 2001) and the computer program DISTANCE (Thomas *et al.* 1998) to sighting data. From 1991 through 1994, line-transect vessel surveys were conducted during spring in the northern Gulf of Mexico from the 200m isobath to the seaward extent of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). Survey effort-weighted estimated average abundance of false killer whales for all surveys combined was 381 (CV=0.62) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). As recommended in the GAMMS Workshop Report (Wade and Angliss 1997), estimates older than 8 years are deemed unreliable, and therefore should not be used for PBR determinations.

Similar surveys were conducted during April/May from 1996 to 2001 (excluding 1998) in oceanic waters of the northern Gulf of Mexico, using NOAA ships *Oregon II* (1996, 1997, 1999) and *Gordon Gunter* (2000, 2001). Estimates for all oceanic strata were summed, as survey effort was not uniformly distributed, to calculate a total estimate for the entire northern Gulf of Mexico oceanic waters (Figure 1; Mullin and Fulling 2004). Due to limited survey effort in any given year, survey effort was pooled across all years to develop an average abundance estimate.

The estimate of abundance for false killer whales in oceanic waters, pooled from 1996 to 2001, is 1,038 (CV=0.71) (Mullin and Fulling 2004), which is the best available abundance estimate for this species in the northern Gulf of Mexico.

### Minimum Population Estimate

The minimum population estimate is the lower limit of the two-tailed 60% confidence interval of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate. This is equivalent to the 20th percentile of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate as specified by Wade and Angliss (1997). The best estimate of abundance for false killer whales is 1,038 (CV=0.71). The minimum population estimate for the northern Gulf of Mexico is 606 false killer whales.

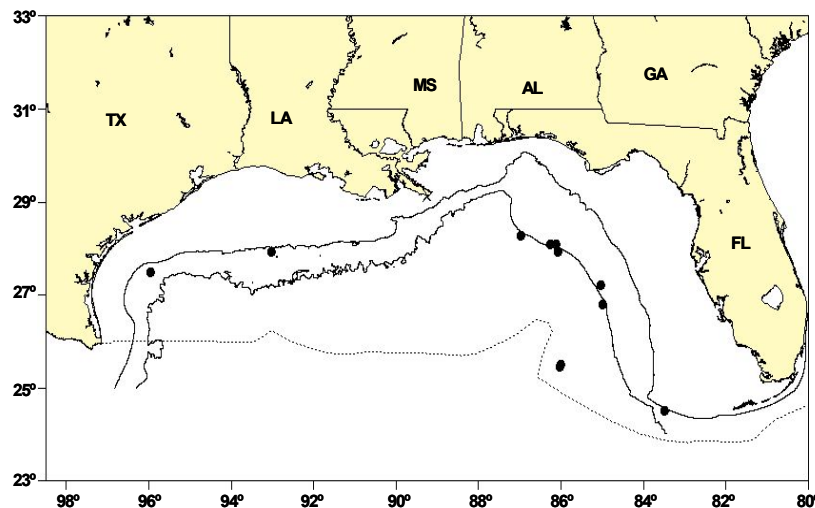


Figure 1. Distribution of false killer whale sightings from SEFSC spring vessel surveys during 1996-2001. All the on-effort sightings are shown, though not all were used to estimate abundance. Solid lines indicate the 100m and 1,000m isobaths and the dotted line indicates the offshore extent of the U.S. EEZ.

### **Current Population Trend**

There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The pooled abundance estimate for 1996-2001 of 1,038 (CV=0.71) and that for 1991-1994 of 381 (CV=0.62) are not significantly different ( $P>0.05$ ), but due to the precision of the estimates, the power to detect a difference is low.

### **CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES**

Current and maximum net productivity rates are unknown for this stock. For purposes of this assessment, the maximum net productivity rate was assumed to be 0.04. This value is based on theoretical modeling showing that cetacean populations may not grow at rates much greater than 4% given the constraints of their reproductive history (Barlow *et al.* 1995).

### **POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL**

Potential biological removal level (PBR) is the product of the minimum population size, one half the maximum net productivity rate and a recovery factor (MMPA Sec. 3.16 U.S.C. 1362; Wade and Angliss 1997). The minimum population size is 606 (CV=0.71). The maximum productivity rate is 0.04, the default value for cetaceans. The “recovery” factor, which accounts for endangered, depleted, threatened stocks, or stocks of unknown status relative to optimum sustainable population (OSP), is assumed to be 0.5 because the stock is of unknown status. PBR for the northern Gulf of Mexico false killer whale is 6.1.

### **ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY**

There has been 1 reported fishing-related mortality of a false killer whale during 1998-2003, which was a stranding in 1999 classified as likely caused by fishery interactions or other human-related causes due to mutilation of limbs (Yeung 1999; Yeung 2001; Garrison 2003; Garrison and Richards 2004).

### **Fisheries Information**

The level of past or current, direct, human-caused mortality of false killer whales in the northern Gulf of Mexico is unknown. Pelagic swordfish, tunas and billfish are the targets of the longline fishery operating in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. There were no reports of mortality or serious injury to false killer whales by this fishery.

### **Other Mortality**

There was 1 reported stranding of a false killer whale in the Gulf of Mexico during 1999-2003. This animal, which stranded in Alabama in 1999, was classified as likely caused by fishery interactions or other human-related causes. The fins and flukes of the animal had been amputated. Stranding data probably underestimate the extent of fishery-related mortality and serious injury because not all of the marine mammals which die or are seriously injured in fishery interactions wash ashore, not all that wash ashore are discovered, reported or investigated, nor will all of those that do wash ashore necessarily show signs of entanglement or other fishery interaction. Finally, the level of technical expertise among stranding network personnel varies widely as does the ability to recognize signs of fishery interactions.

### **STATUS OF STOCK**

The status of false killer whales in the northern Gulf of Mexico, relative to OSP, is unknown. The species is not listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The total fishery-related mortality and serious injury for this stock is unknown, but assumed to be less than 10% of the calculated PBR and can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. This is not a strategic stock because average annual fishery-related mortality and serious injury does not exceed PBR.

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## FRASER'S DOLPHIN (*Lagenodelphis hosei*): Northern Gulf of Mexico Stock

### STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

Fraser's dolphin is distributed worldwide in tropical waters (Perrin *et al.* 1994). Sightings in the northern Gulf of Mexico occur in oceanic waters (>200m) (Figure 1). Fraser's dolphins have been observed in the northern Gulf of Mexico during all seasons (Leatherwood *et al.* 1993; Hansen *et al.* 1996; Mullin and Hoggard 2000).

The Gulf of Mexico population is provisionally being considered 1 stock for management purposes, although there is currently no information to differentiate this stock from the Atlantic Ocean stock(s). Additional morphological, genetic and/or behavioral data are needed to provide further information on stock delineation.

### POPULATION SIZE

Estimates of abundance were derived through the application of distance sampling analysis (Buckland *et al.* 2001) and the computer program DISTANCE (Thomas *et al.* 1998) to sighting data. From 1991 through 1994, line-transect vessel surveys were conducted during spring in the northern Gulf of Mexico from the 200m isobath to the seaward extent of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (Hansen *et al.* 1995).

Survey effort-weighted estimated average abundance of Fraser's dolphins for all surveys combined was 127 (CV= 0.90) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). As recommended in the GAMMS Workshop Report (Wade and Angliss 1997), estimates older than 8 years are deemed unreliable, and therefore should not be used for PBR determinations. Similar surveys were conducted during April/May from 1996 to 2001 (excluding 1998) in oceanic waters of the northern Gulf of Mexico, using NOAA ships *Oregon II* (1996, 1997, 1999) and *Gordon Gunter* (2000, 2001). Estimates for all oceanic strata were summed, as survey effort was not uniformly distributed, to calculate a total estimate for the entire northern Gulf of Mexico oceanic waters (Mullin and Fulling 2004). Due to limited survey effort in any given year, survey effort was pooled across all years to develop an average abundance estimate.

The estimate of abundance for Fraser's dolphins in oceanic waters, pooled from 1996 to 2001, is 726 (CV=0.70) (Mullin and Fulling 2004), which is the best available abundance estimate for this species in the northern Gulf of Mexico.

### Minimum Population Estimate

The minimum population estimate is the lower limit of the two-tailed 60% confidence interval of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate. This is equivalent to the 20th percentile of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate as specified by Wade and Angliss (1997). The best estimate of abundance for Fraser's dolphins is 726 (CV=0.70). The minimum population estimate for the northern Gulf of Mexico is 427 Fraser's dolphins.

### Current Population Trend

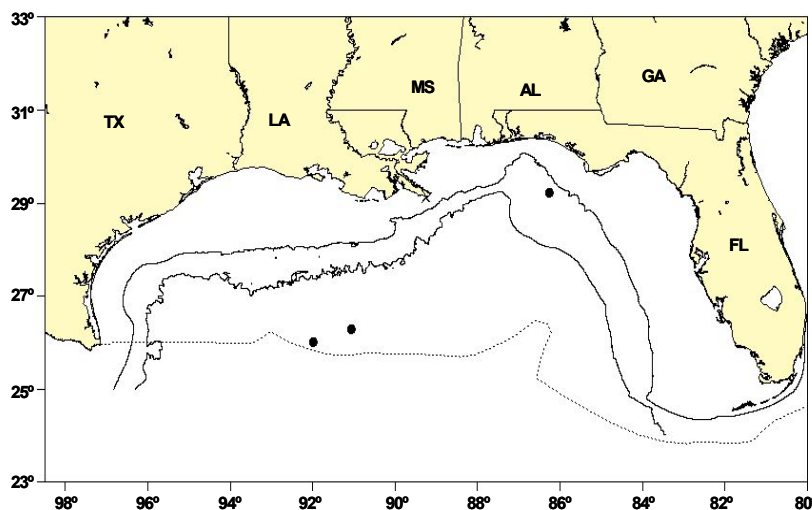


Figure 1. Distribution of Fraser's dolphin sightings from SEFSC spring vessel surveys during 1996-2001. All the on-effort sightings are shown, though not all were used to estimate abundance. Solid lines indicate the 100m and 1,000m isobaths and the dotted line indicates the offshore extent of the U.S. EEZ.

There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The pooled abundance estimate for 1996-2001 of 726 (CV=0.70) and that for 1991-1994 of 127 (CV=0.89) are not significantly different ( $P>0.05$ ), but due to the precision of the estimates, the power to detect a difference is low.

#### **CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES**

Current and maximum net productivity rates are unknown for this stock. For purposes of this assessment, the maximum net productivity rate was assumed to be 0.04. This value is based on theoretical modeling showing that cetacean populations may not grow at rates much greater than 4% given the constraints of their reproductive history (Barlow *et al.* 1995).

#### **POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL**

Potential biological removal level (PBR) is the product of the minimum population size, one half the maximum net productivity rate and a recovery factor (MMPA Sec. 3.16 U.S.C. 1362; Wade and Angliss 1997). The minimum population size is 427 (CV=0.70). The maximum productivity rate is 0.04, the default value for cetaceans. The “recovery” factor, which accounts for endangered, depleted, threatened stocks, or stocks of unknown status relative to optimum sustainable population (OSP), is assumed to be 0.5 because the stock is of unknown status. PBR for the northern Gulf of Mexico Fraser’s dolphin is 4.3.

#### **ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY**

There has been no reported fishing-related mortality of a Fraser’s dolphin during 1998-2003 (Yeung 1999, Yeung 2001; Garrison 2003; Garrison and Richards 2004).

#### **Fisheries Information**

The level of past or current, direct, human-caused mortality of Fraser’s dolphins in the northern Gulf of Mexico is unknown. Pelagic swordfish, tunas and billfish are the targets of the longline fishery operating in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. There were no reports of mortality or serious injury to Fraser’s dolphins by this fishery.

#### **Other Mortality**

There was 1 reported stranding event of Fraser’s dolphins in the Gulf of Mexico during 1999-2003. Ten animals mass stranded in Florida during April 2003. There was no evidence of human interaction for these stranded animals. Stranding data probably underestimate the extent of fishery-related mortality and serious injury because not all of the marine mammals which die or are seriously injured in fishery interactions wash ashore, not all that wash ashore are discovered, reported or investigated, nor will all of those that do wash ashore necessarily show signs of entanglement or other fishery-interaction. Finally, the level of technical expertise among stranding network personnel varies widely as does the ability to recognize signs of fishery interactions.

#### **STATUS OF STOCK**

The status of Fraser’s dolphins in the northern Gulf of Mexico, relative to OSP, is unknown. The species is not listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The total fishery-related mortality and serious injury for this stock is unknown, but assumed to be less than 10% of the calculated PBR and can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. This is not a strategic stock because average annual fishery-related mortality and serious injury does not exceed PBR.

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## KILLER WHALE (*Orcinus orca*): Northern Gulf of Mexico Stock

### STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

The killer whale is distributed worldwide from tropical to polar regions (Leatherwood and Reeves 1983). Sightings of these animals in the northern Gulf of Mexico during 1951-1995 occurred primarily in oceanic waters ranging from 256 to 2,652m (averaging 1,242m) in the north-central Gulf of Mexico (O'Sullivan and Mullin 1997). Despite extensive shelf surveys (O'Sullivan and Mullin 1997), no killer whales have been reported on the Gulf of Mexico shelf waters other than those reported in 1921, 1985 and 1987 by Katona *et al.* (1988). Killer whales were seen only in the summer during GulfCet aerial surveys of the northern Gulf of Mexico between 1992 and 1998 (Hansen *et al.* 1996; Mullin and Hoggard 2000), were reported from May through June during vessel surveys (Mullin and Fulling 2004) and recorded in May, August, September and November by earlier opportunistic ship-based sources (O'Sullivan and Mullin 1997).

Different stocks were identified in the northeastern Pacific based on morphological, behavioral and genetic characteristics (Bigg *et al.* 1990; Hoelzel 1991). There is no information on stock differentiation for the Atlantic Ocean population, although an analysis of vocalizations of killer whales from Iceland and Norway indicated that whales from these areas may represent different stocks (Moore *et al.* 1988). Thirty-two individuals have been photographically identified to date, with 6 individuals having been sighted over a 5 year period, and 1 whale resighted over 10 years. Three animals have been sighted over a range of more than 1,100km (O'Sullivan and Mullin 1997). The Gulf of Mexico population is provisionally being considered a separate stock for management purposes, although there is currently no information to differentiate this stock from the Atlantic Ocean stock(s). Additional morphological, genetic and/or behavioral data are needed to provide further information on stock delineation.

### POPULATION SIZE

Estimates of abundance were derived through the application of distance sampling analysis (Buckland *et al.* 2001) and the computer program DISTANCE (Thomas *et al.* 1998) to sighting data. From 1991 through 1994, line-transect vessel surveys were conducted during summer in the northern Gulf of Mexico from the 200m isobath to the seaward extent of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). Survey effort-weighted estimated average abundance of killer whales for all surveys combined was 277 (CV=0.42) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). As recommended in the GAMMS Workshop Report (Wade and Angliss 1997), estimates older than 8 years are deemed unreliable, and therefore should not be used for PBR determinations.

Similar surveys were conducted during April/May from 1996 to 2001 (excluding 1998) in oceanic waters of the northern Gulf of Mexico, using NOAA ships *Oregon II* (1996, 1997, 1999) and *Gordon Gunter* (2000, 2001). Estimates for all oceanic strata were summed, as survey effort was not uniformly

distributed, to calculate a total estimate for the entire northern Gulf of Mexico oceanic waters (Figure 1; Mullin and

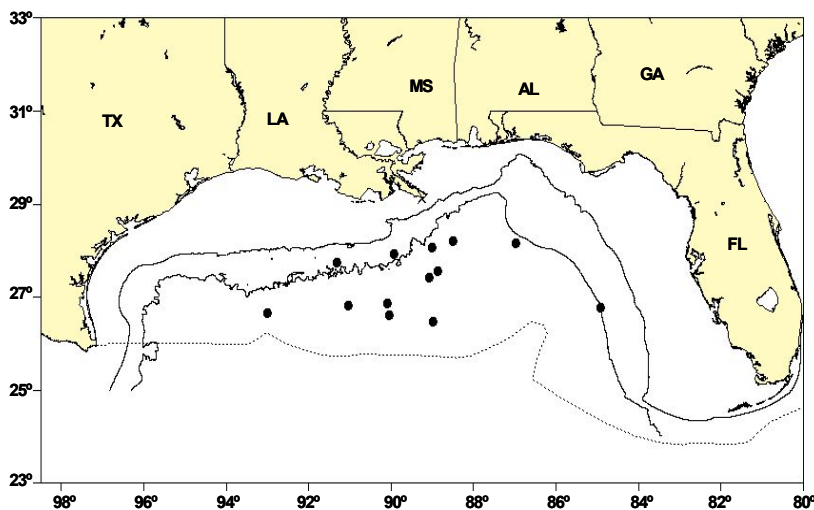


Figure 1. Distribution of killer whale sightings from SEFSC spring vessel surveys during 1996-2001. All the on-effort sightings are shown, though not all were used to estimate abundance. Solid lines indicate the 100m and 1,000m isobaths and the dotted line indicates the offshore extent of the U.S. EEZ.

Fulling 2004). Due to limited survey effort in any given year, survey effort was pooled across all years to develop an average abundance estimate.

The estimate of abundance for killer whales in oceanic waters, pooled from 1996 to 2001, is 133 (CV=0.49) (Mullin and Fulling 2004), which is the best available abundance estimate for this species in the northern Gulf of Mexico.

#### **Minimum Population Estimate**

The minimum population estimate is the lower limit of the two-tailed 60% confidence interval of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate. This is equivalent to the 20th percentile of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate as specified by Wade and Angliss (1997). The best estimate of abundance for killer whales is 133 (CV=0.49). The minimum population estimate for the northern Gulf of Mexico is 90 killer whales.

#### **Current Population Trend**

There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The pooled abundance estimate for 1996-2001 of 133 (CV=0.49) and that for 1991-1994 of 277 (CV=0.42) are not significantly different ( $P>0.05$ ), but due to the precision of the estimates, the power to detect a difference is low.

#### **CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES**

Current and maximum net productivity rates are unknown for this stock. For purposes of this assessment, the maximum net productivity rate was assumed to be 0.04. This value is based on theoretical modeling showing that cetacean populations may not grow at rates much greater than 4% given the constraints of their reproductive history (Barlow *et al.* 1995).

#### **POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL**

Potential biological removal level (PBR) is the product of the minimum population size, one half the maximum net productivity rate and a recovery factor (MMPA Sec. 3.16 U.S.C. 1362; Wade and Angliss 1997). The minimum population size is 90 (CV=0.40). The maximum productivity rate is 0.04, the default value for cetaceans. The “recovery” factor, which accounts for endangered, depleted, threatened stocks, or stocks of unknown status relative to optimum sustainable population (OSP), is assumed to be 0.5 because the stock is of unknown status. PBR for the northern Gulf of Mexico killer whale is 0.9.

#### **ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY**

There has been no reported fishing-related mortality of a killer whale during 1998-2003 (Yeung 1999; Yeung 2001; Garrison 2003; Garrison and Richards 2004).

#### **Fisheries Information**

The level of past or current, direct, human-caused mortality of killer whales in the northern Gulf of Mexico is unknown. Pelagic swordfish, tunas and billfish are the targets of the longline fishery operating in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. There were no reports of mortality or serious injury to killer whales by this fishery.

#### **Other Mortality**

There were no reported strandings of killer whales in the Gulf of Mexico during 1999-2003. Stranding data probably underestimate the extent of fishery-related mortality and serious injury because not all of the marine mammals which die or are seriously injured in fishery interactions wash ashore, not all that wash ashore are discovered, reported or investigated, nor will all of those that do wash ashore necessarily show signs of entanglement or other fishery interaction. Finally, the level of technical expertise among stranding network personnel varies widely as does the ability to recognize signs of fishery interactions.

#### **STATUS OF STOCK**

The status of killer whales in the northern Gulf of Mexico, relative to OSP, is unknown. The species is not listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The total fishery-related mortality and serious injury for this stock is unknown, but assumed to be less than 10% of the calculated PBR and can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. This is not a strategic stock because average annual fishery-related mortality and serious injury does not exceed PBR.

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## MELON-HEADED WHALE (*Peponocephala electra*): Northern Gulf of Mexico Stock

### STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

The melon-headed whale is distributed worldwide in tropical to sub-tropical waters (Jefferson *et al.* 1994). Sightings in the northern Gulf of Mexico occur in oceanic waters (Mullin *et al.* 1994; Mullin and Fulling 2004). Sightings of melon-headed whales were documented in all seasons during GulfCet aerial surveys of the northern Gulf of Mexico between 1992 and 1998 (Hansen *et al.* 1996; Mullin and Hoggard 2000).

The Gulf of Mexico population is provisionally being considered 1 stock for management purposes, although there is currently no information to differentiate this stock from the Atlantic Ocean stock(s). Additional morphological, genetic and/or behavioral data are needed to provide further information on stock delineation.

### POPULATION SIZE

Estimates of abundance were derived through the application of distance sampling analysis (Buckland *et al.* 2001) and the computer program DISTANCE (Thomas *et al.* 1998) to sighting data. From 1991 through 1994, line-transect vessel surveys were conducted during spring in the northern Gulf of Mexico from the 200m isobath to the seaward extent of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). Survey effort-weighted estimated average abundance of melon-headed whales for all surveys combined was 3,965 (CV=0.39) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). As recommended in the GAMMS Workshop Report (Wade and Angliss 1997), estimates older than 8 years are deemed unreliable, and therefore should not be used for PBR determinations.

Similar surveys were conducted during April/May from 1996 to 2001 (excluding 1998) in oceanic waters of the northern Gulf of Mexico, using NOAA ships *Oregon II* (1996, 1997, 1999) and *Gordon Gunter* (2000, 2001). Estimates for all oceanic strata were summed, as survey effort was not uniformly distributed, to calculate a total estimate for the entire northern Gulf of Mexico oceanic waters (Figure 1; Mullin and Fulling 2004). Due to limited survey effort in any given year, survey effort was pooled across all years to develop an average abundance estimate.

The estimate of abundance for melon-headed whales in oceanic waters, pooled from 1996 to 2001, is 3,451 (CV=0.55) (Mullin and Fulling 2004), which is the best available abundance estimate for this species in the northern Gulf of Mexico.

### Minimum Population Estimate

The minimum population estimate is the lower limit of the two-tailed 60% confidence interval of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate. This is equivalent to the 20th percentile of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate as specified by Wade and Angliss (1997). The best estimate of abundance for melon-headed whales is 3,451 (CV=0.55). The minimum population estimate for the northern Gulf of Mexico is 2,238 melon-headed whales.

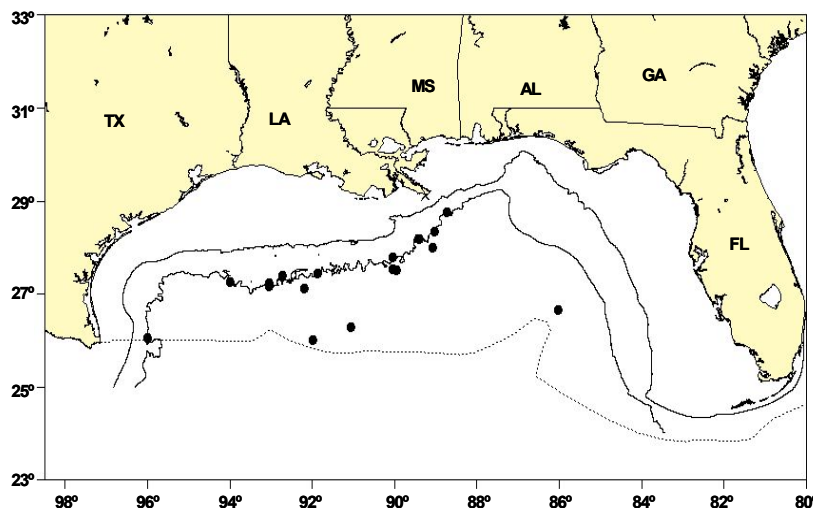


Figure 1. Distribution of melon-headed whale sightings from SEFSC spring vessel surveys during 1996-2001. All the on-effort sightings are shown, though not all were used to estimate abundance. Solid lines indicate the 100m and 1,000m isobaths and the dotted line indicates the offshore extent of the U.S. EEZ.

### Current Population Trend

There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The pooled abundance estimate for 1996-2001 of 3,451 (CV=0.55) and that for 1991-1994 of 3,965 (CV=0.39) are not significantly different ( $P>0.05$ ), but due to the precision of the estimates, the power to detect a difference is low.

### CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES

Current and maximum net productivity rates are unknown for this stock. For purposes of this assessment, the maximum net productivity rate was assumed to be 0.04. This value is based on theoretical modeling showing that cetacean populations may not grow at rates much greater than 4% given the constraints of their reproductive history (Barlow *et al.* 1995).

### POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL

Potential biological removal level (PBR) is the product of the minimum population size, one half the maximum net productivity rate and a recovery factor (MMPA Sec. 3.16 U.S.C. 1362; Wade and Angliss 1997). The minimum population size is 2,238 (CV=0.55). The maximum productivity rate is 0.04, the default value for cetaceans. The “recovery” factor, which accounts for endangered, depleted, threatened stocks, or stocks of unknown status relative to optimum sustainable population (OPS), is assumed to be 0.5 because the stock is of unknown status. PBR for the northern Gulf of Mexico melon-headed whale is 22.

### ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY

There has been no reported fishing-related mortality of a melon-headed whale during 1998-2003 (Yeung 1999; Yeung 2001; Garrison 2003; Garrison and Richards 2004).

### Fisheries Information

The level of past or current, direct, human-caused mortality of melon-headed whales in the northern Gulf of Mexico is unknown. There has historically been some take of this species in small cetacean fisheries in the Caribbean (Caldwell *et al.* 1976). Pelagic swordfish, tunas and billfish are the targets of the longline fishery operating in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. There were no reports of mortality or serious injury to melon-headed whales by this fishery.

### Other Mortality

There were 6 reported strandings of melon-headed whales in the Gulf of Mexico during 1999-2003. There was no evidence of human interactions for these stranded animals. Stranding data probably underestimate the extent of fishery-related mortality and serious injury because not all of the marine mammals which die or are seriously injured in fishery interactions wash ashore, not all that wash ashore are discovered, reported or investigated, nor will all of those that do wash ashore necessarily show signs of entanglement or other fishery-interaction. Finally, the level of technical expertise among stranding network personnel varies widely as does the ability to recognize signs of fishery interactions.

Table 1. Melon-headed whale (*Peponocephala electra*) strandings along the U.S. Gulf of Mexico coast, 1999-2003.

State	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	TOTAL
Alabama	0	0	0	0	2	2
Florida	0	0	0	0	0	0
Louisiana	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mississippi	0	0	0	0	0	0
Texas	0	1	0	0	2	3
<b>Total</b>	0	1	0	0	4	5

### STATUS OF STOCK

The status of melon-headed whales in the northern Gulf of Mexico, relative to OSP, is unknown. The species is not listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. There are insufficient data to

determine the population trends for this species. The total fishery-related mortality and serious injury for this stock is unknown, but assumed to be less than 10% of the calculated PBR and can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. This is not a strategic stock because average annual fishery-related mortality and serious injury does not exceed PBR.

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## PANTROPICAL SPOTTED DOLPHIN (*Stenella attenuata*): Northern Gulf of Mexico Stock

### STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

There are two species of spotted dolphin in the Atlantic Ocean, the Atlantic spotted dolphin (*Stenella frontalis*) and the pantropical spotted dolphin (*S. attenuata*) (Perrin *et al.* 1987). The Atlantic spotted dolphin occurs in two forms which may be distinct sub-species (Perrin *et al.* 1987, 1994; Rice 1998): the large, heavily spotted form which inhabits the continental shelf and is usually found inside or near the 200m isobath; and the smaller, less spotted island and offshore form which occurs in the Atlantic Ocean but is not known to occur in the Gulf of Mexico (Fulling *et al.* 2003; Mullin and Fulling 2003; Mullin and Fulling 2004). Where they co-occur, the offshore form of the Atlantic spotted dolphin and the pantropical spotted dolphin can be difficult to differentiate at sea.

The pantropical spotted dolphin is distributed worldwide in tropical and some sub-tropical oceans (Perrin *et al.* 1987; Perrin and Hohn 1994). Sightings of this species occur in oceanic waters of the northern Gulf of Mexico (Mullin and Fulling 2004). Pantropical spotted dolphins were seen in all seasons during GulfCet aerial surveys of the northern Gulf of Mexico between 1992 and 1998 (Hansen *et al.* 1996; Mullin and Hoggard 2000).

Some of the Pacific Ocean populations have been divided into different geographic stocks based on morphological characteristics (Perrin *et al.* 1987; Perrin and Hohn 1994). The Gulf of Mexico population is provisionally being considered a separate stock for management purposes, although there is currently no information to differentiate this stock from the Atlantic Ocean stock(s). Additional morphological, genetic and/or behavioral data are needed to provide further information on stock delineation.

### POPULATION SIZE

Estimates of abundance were derived through the application of distance sampling analysis (Buckland *et al.* 2001) and the computer program DISTANCE (Thomas *et al.* 1998) to sighting data. From 1991 through 1994, line-transect vessel surveys were conducted during spring in the northern Gulf of Mexico from the 200m isobath to the seaward extent of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). Survey effort-weighted estimated average abundance of pantropical spotted dolphins for all surveys combined was 31,320 (CV=0.20) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). As recommended in the GAMMS Workshop Report (Wade and Angliss 1997), estimates older than 8 years are deemed unreliable, and therefore should not be used for PBR determinations.

Similar surveys were conducted during April/May from 1996 to 2001 (excluding 1998) in oceanic waters of the northern Gulf of Mexico, using NOAA ships *Oregon II* (1996, 1997, 1999) and *Gordon Gunter* (2000, 2001). Estimates for all oceanic strata were summed, as survey effort was not uniformly distributed, to calculate a total estimate for the entire northern Gulf of Mexico oceanic waters (Figure 1; Mullin and Fulling 2004). Due to limited survey effort in any given year, survey effort was pooled across all years to develop an average abundance estimate.

The estimate of abundance for pantropical spotted dolphins in oceanic waters, pooled from 1996 to 2001, is 91,321 (CV=0.16) (Mullin and Fulling 2004), which is the best available abundance estimate for this species in the northern Gulf of Mexico.

### Minimum Population Estimate

The minimum population estimate is the lower limit of the two-tailed 60% confidence interval of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate. This is equivalent to the 20th percentile of the log-normal distributed

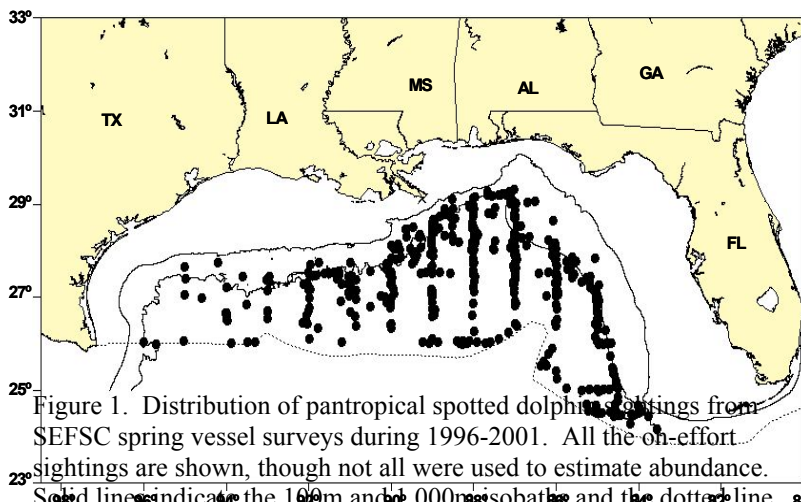


Figure 1. Distribution of pantropical spotted dolphins sightings from SEFSC spring vessel surveys during 1996-2001. All the on-effort sightings are shown, though not all were used to estimate abundance. Solid lines indicate the 100m and 1,000m isobaths and the dotted line indicates the offshore extent of the U.S. EEZ.



abundance estimate as specified by Wade and Angliss (1997). The best estimate of abundance for pantropical spotted dolphins is 91,321 (CV=0.16). The minimum population estimate for the northern Gulf of Mexico is 79,879 pantropical spotted dolphins.

### Current Population Trend

There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The pooled abundance estimate for 1996-2001 of 91,321 (CV=0.16) and that for 1991-1994 of 31,320 (CV=0.20) are significantly different ( $P<0.05$ ). This change in abundance is difficult to interpret without a Gulf of Mexico-wide understanding of pantropical spotted dolphin abundance. Sixty-five percent of the oceanic waters in the Gulf of Mexico are south of the U.S. EEZ, and a shift in distribution across this boundary would not be detected.

### CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES

Current and maximum net productivity rates are unknown for this stock. For purposes of this assessment, the maximum net productivity rate was assumed to be 0.04. This value is based on theoretical modeling showing that cetacean populations may not grow at rates much greater than 4% given the constraints of their reproductive history (Barlow *et al.* 1995).

### POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL

Potential biological removal level (PBR) is the product of the minimum population size, one half the maximum net productivity rate, and a recovery factor (MMPA Sec. 3.16 U.S.C. 1362; Wade and Angliss 1997). The minimum population size is 79,879 (CV=0.16). The maximum productivity rate is 0.04, the default value for cetaceans. The “recovery” factor, which accounts for endangered, depleted, threatened stocks, or stocks of unknown status relative to optimum sustainable population (OSP), is assumed to be 0.5 because the stock is of unknown status. PBR for the northern Gulf of Mexico pantropical spotted dolphin is 799.

### ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY

There was 1 documented stranding of a pantropical spotted dolphin in the northern Gulf of Mexico during 1987-1994 which was classified as likely caused by fishery interactions. There has been no reported fishing-related mortality of pantropical spotted dolphins during 1998-2003 (Yeung 1999; Yeung 2001; Garrison 2003; Garrison and Richards 2004).

### Fisheries Information

The level of past or current, direct, human-caused mortality of pantropical spotted dolphins in the northern Gulf of Mexico is unknown. Pelagic swordfish, tunas and billfish are the targets of the longline fishery operating in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. There were no reports of mortality or serious injury to pantropical spotted dolphins by this fishery during 1998-2003.

### Other Mortality

Four pantropical spotted dolphins stranded in the Gulf of Mexico during 1999-2003 (Table 1). There was no evidence of human interactions for the stranded animals. Stranding data probably underestimate the extent of fishery-related mortality and serious injury because not all of the marine mammals which die or are seriously injured in fishery interactions wash ashore, not all that wash ashore are discovered, reported or investigated, nor will all of those that do wash ashore necessarily show signs of entanglement or other fishery interaction. Finally, the level of technical expertise among stranding network personnel varies widely as does the ability to recognize signs of fishery interactions.

Table 1. Pantropical spotted dolphin (*Stenella attenuata*) strandings along the U.S. Gulf of Mexico coast, 1999-2003.

State	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	TOTAL
Alabama	0	0	0	0	0	0
Florida	0	0	0	1	1	2
Louisiana	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mississippi	0	0	0	0	0	0

Texas	1	0	1	0	0	2
<b>Total</b>	1	0	1	1	1	4

## STATUS OF STOCK

The status of pantropical spotted dolphins in the northern Gulf of Mexico, relative to OSP, is unknown. The species is not listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The total fishery-related mortality and serious injury for this stock is unknown, but assumed to be less than 10% of the calculated PBR and can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. This is not a strategic stock because average annual fishery-related mortality and serious injury does not exceed PBR.

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## PYGMY KILLER WHALE (*Feresa attenuata*): Northern Gulf of Mexico Stock

### STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

The pygmy killer whale is distributed worldwide in tropical and subtropical waters (Ross and Leatherwood 1994). Sightings of these animals in the northern Gulf of Mexico occur in oceanic waters (Mullin and Fulling 2004). Sightings of pygmy killer whales were documented in all seasons during GulfCet aerial surveys of the northern Gulf of Mexico between 1992 and 1998 (Hansen *et al.* 1996; Mullin and Hoggard 2000).

The Gulf of Mexico population is provisionally being considered a separate stock for management purposes, although there is currently no information to differentiate this stock from the Atlantic Ocean stock(s). Additional morphological, genetic and/or behavioral data are needed to provide further information on stock delineation.

### POPULATION SIZE

Estimates of abundance were derived through the application of distance sampling analysis (Buckland *et al.* 2001) and the computer program DISTANCE (Thomas *et al.* 1998) to sighting data. From 1991 through 1994, line-transect vessel surveys were conducted during spring in the northern Gulf of Mexico from the 200m isobath to the seaward extent of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). Survey effort-weighted estimated average abundance of pygmy killer whales for all surveys combined was 518 (CV=0.81) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). As recommended in the GAMMS Workshop Report (Wade and Angliss 1997), estimates older than 8 years are deemed unreliable, and therefore should not be used for PBR determinations.

Similar surveys were conducted during April/May from 1996 to 2001 (excluding 1998) in oceanic waters of the northern Gulf of Mexico, using NOAA ships *Oregon II* (1996, 1997, 1999) and *Gordon Gunter* (2000, 2001). Estimates for all oceanic strata were

summed, as survey effort was not uniformly distributed, to calculate a total estimate for the entire northern Gulf of Mexico oceanic waters (Figure 1; Mullin and Fulling 2004). Due to limited survey effort in any given year, survey effort was pooled across all years to develop an average abundance estimate.

The estimate of abundance for pygmy killer whales in oceanic waters, pooled from 1996 to 2001, is 408 (CV=0.60) (Mullin and Fulling 2004), which is the best available abundance estimate for this species in the northern Gulf of Mexico.

### Minimum Population Estimate

The minimum population estimate is the lower limit of the two-tailed 60% confidence interval of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate. This is equivalent to the 20th percentile of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate as specified by Wade and Angliss (1997). The best estimate of abundance for pygmy killer whales is 408 (CV=0.60). The minimum population estimate for the northern Gulf of Mexico is 256 pygmy killer whales.

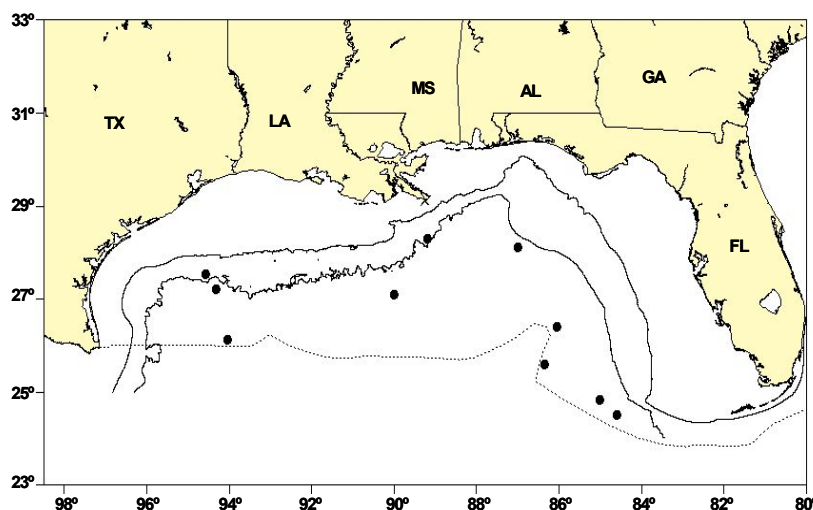


Figure 1. Distribution of pygmy killer whale sightings from SEFSC spring vessel surveys during 1996-2001. All the on-effort sightings are shown, though not all were used to estimate abundance. Solid lines indicate the 100m and 1,000m isobaths and the dotted line indicates the offshore extent of the U.S. EEZ.

### **Current Population Trend**

There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The pooled abundance estimate for 1996-2001 of 408 (CV=0.60) and that for 1991-1994 of 518 (CV=0.81) are not significantly different ( $P>0.05$ ), but due to the precision of the estimates, the power to detect a difference is low.

### **CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES**

Current and maximum net productivity rates are unknown for this stock. For purposes of this assessment, the maximum net productivity rate was assumed to be 0.04. This value is based on theoretical modeling showing that cetacean populations may not grow at rates much greater than 4% given the constraints of their reproductive history (Barlow *et al.* 1995).

### **POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL**

Potential biological removal level (PBR) is the product of the minimum population size, one half the maximum net productivity rate and a recovery factor (MMPA Sec. 3.16 U.S.C. 1362; Wade and Angliss 1997). The minimum population size is 256 (CV=0.60). The maximum productivity rate is 0.04, the default value for cetaceans. The “recovery” factor, which accounts for endangered, depleted, threatened stocks, or stocks of unknown status relative to optimum sustainable population (OSP), is assumed to be 0.5 because the stock is of unknown status. PBR for the northern Gulf of Mexico pygmy killer whale is 2.6.

### **ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY**

There has been no reported fishing-related mortality of a pygmy killer whale during 1998-2003 (Yeung 1999; Yeung 2001; Garrison 2003; Garrison and Richards 2004).

### **Fisheries Information**

The level of past or current, direct, human-caused mortality of pygmy killer whales in the northern Gulf of Mexico is unknown. There has historically been some take of this species in small cetacean fisheries in the Caribbean (Caldwell and Caldwell 1971). Pelagic swordfish, tunas and billfish are the targets of the longline fishery operating in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. There were no reports of mortality or serious injury to pygmy killer whales by this fishery.

### **Other Mortality**

There was 1 reported stranding of a pygmy killer whale in the Gulf of Mexico during 1999-2003. There was no evidence of human interaction for this stranded animal. Stranding data probably underestimate the extent of fishery-related mortality and serious injury because not all of the marine mammals which die or are seriously injured in fishery interactions wash ashore, not all that wash ashore are discovered, reported or investigated, nor will all of those that do wash ashore necessarily show signs of entanglement or other fishery interaction. Finally, the level of technical expertise among stranding network personnel varies widely as does the ability to recognize signs of fishery interactions.

### **STATUS OF STOCK**

The status of pygmy killer whales in the northern Gulf of Mexico, relative to OSP, is unknown. The species is not listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The total fishery-related mortality and serious injury for this stock is unknown, but assumed to be less than 10% of the calculated PBR and can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. This is not a strategic stock because average annual fishery-related mortality and serious injury does not exceed PBR.

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## PYGMY SPERM WHALE (*Kogia breviceps*): Northern Gulf of Mexico Stock

### STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

The pygmy sperm whale appears to be distributed worldwide in temperate to tropical waters (Caldwell and Caldwell 1989). Sightings of these animals in the northern Gulf of Mexico occur primarily in oceanic waters (Figure 1; Mullin *et al.* 1991; Mullin and Fulling 2004). Pygmy sperm whales and dwarf sperm whales (*Kogia sima*) are difficult to differentiate at sea, and sightings of either species are often categorized as *Kogia* sp. Sightings of this category were documented in all seasons during GulfCet aerial surveys of the northern Gulf of Mexico from 1992 to 1998 (Hansen *et al.* 1996; Mullin and Hoggard 2000). The difficulty in sighting pygmy and dwarf sperm whales may be exacerbated by their avoidance reaction towards ships, and change in behavior towards approaching survey aircraft (Würsig *et al.* 1998).

In a study using hematological and stable-isotope data, Barros *et al.* (1998) speculated that dwarf sperm whales may have a more pelagic distribution than pygmy sperm whales, and/or dive deeper during feeding bouts. The Gulf of Mexico population is provisionally being considered a separate stock for management purposes, although there is currently no information to differentiate this stock from the Atlantic Ocean stock(s). Additional morphological, genetic and/or behavioral data are needed to provide further information on stock delineation.

### POPULATION SIZE

Estimates of abundance were derived through the application of distance sampling analysis (Buckland *et al.* 2001) and the computer program DISTANCE (Thomas *et al.* 1998) to sighting data. From 1991 through 1994, line-transect vessel surveys were conducted during spring in the northern Gulf of Mexico from the 200m isobath to the seaward extent of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). Survey effort-weighted estimated average abundance of pygmy and dwarf sperm whales for all surveys combined was 547 (CV=0.28) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). As recommended in the GAMMS Workshop Report (Wade and Angliss 1997), estimates older than 8 years are deemed unreliable, and therefore should not be used for PBR determinations.

Similar surveys were conducted during April/May from 1996 to 2001 (excluding 1998) in oceanic waters of the northern Gulf of Mexico, using NOAA ships *Oregon II* (1996, 1997, 1999) and *Gordon Gunter* (2000, 2001). Estimates for all oceanic strata were summed, as survey effort was not uniformly distributed, to calculate a total estimate for the entire northern Gulf of Mexico oceanic waters (Figure 1; Mullin and Fulling 2004). Due to limited survey effort in any given year, survey effort was pooled across all years to develop an average abundance estimate. abundance for pygmy and dwarf sperm whales in oceanic waters, pooled from 1996 to 2001, is 742 (CV=0.29) (Mullin and Fulling 2004), which is the best available abundance estimate for these species in the northern Gulf of Mexico. A separate estimate of abundance for pygmy sperm whales cannot be estimated due to uncertainty of species identification at sea.

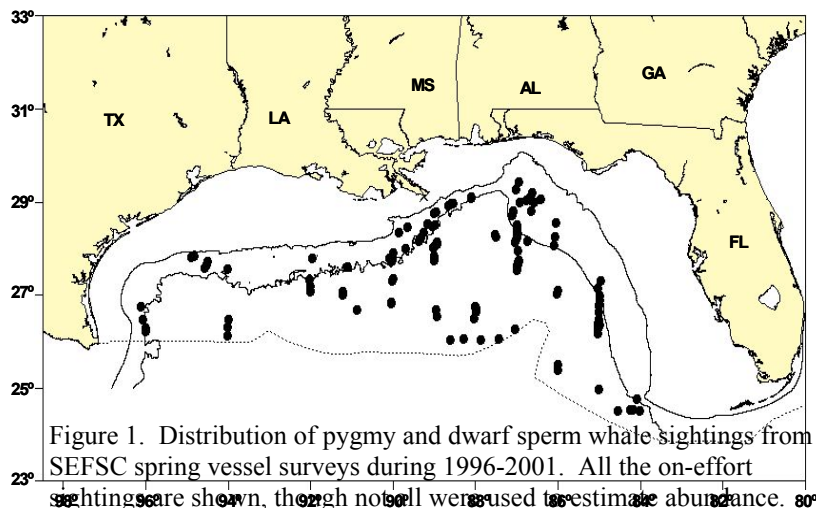


Figure 1. Distribution of pygmy and dwarf sperm whale sightings from SEFSC spring vessel surveys during 1996-2001. All the on-effort sightings are shown, though not all were used to estimate abundance. Solid lines indicate the 100m and 1,000m isobaths and the dotted line indicates the offshore extent of the U.S. EEZ.

### Minimum Population Estimate

The minimum population estimate is the lower limit of the two-tailed 60% confidence interval of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate. This is equivalent to the 20th percentile of the log-normal distributed

abundance estimate as specified by Wade and Angliss (1997). The best estimate of abundance for pygmy and dwarf sperm whales is 742 (CV=0.29). It is not possible to determine the minimum population estimate for only pygmy sperm whales. The minimum population estimate for the northern Gulf of Mexico is 584 pygmy and dwarf sperm whales.

#### Current Population Trend

There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species.

#### CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES

Current and maximum net productivity rates are unknown for this stock. For purposes of this assessment, the maximum net productivity rate was assumed to be 0.04. This value is based on theoretical modeling showing that cetacean populations may not grow at rates much greater than 4% given the constraints of their reproductive history (Barlow *et al.* 1995).

#### POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL

Potential biological removal level (PBR) is the product of the minimum population size, one half the maximum net productivity rate and a recovery factor (MMPA Sec. 3.16 U.S.C. 1362; Wade and Angliss 1997). The minimum population size for pygmy and dwarf sperm whales is 584 (CV=0.29). The maximum productivity rate is 0.04, the default value for cetaceans. The “recovery” factor, which accounts for endangered, depleted, threatened stocks, or stocks of unknown status relative to optimum sustainable population (OSP), is assumed to be 0.5 because the stock is of unknown status. PBR for the northern Gulf of Mexico pygmy and dwarf sperm whales is 5.8. It is not possible to determine the PBR for only pygmy sperm whales.

#### ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY

There has been no reported fishing-related mortality of dwarf or pygmy sperm whales during 1998-2003 (Yeung 1999; Yeung 2001; Garrison 2003; Garrison and Richards 2004).

#### Fisheries Information

The level of past or current, direct, human-caused mortality of dwarf sperm whales in the northern Gulf of Mexico is unknown. Pelagic swordfish, tunas and billfish are the targets of the longline fishery operating in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. There were no reports of mortality or serious injury to dwarf sperm whales by this fishery.

#### Other Mortality

At least 12 pygmy sperm whale strandings were documented in the northern Gulf of Mexico during 1999-2003 (Table 1). Two animals mass stranded in Florida during January 2001. An additional 5 *Kogia* spp. stranded during 1999-2003. Stranding data probably underestimate the extent of fishery-related mortality and serious injury because not all of the marine mammals which die or are seriously injured in fishery interactions wash ashore, not all that wash ashore are discovered, reported or investigated, nor will all of those that do wash ashore necessarily show signs of entanglement or other fishery interaction. Finally, the level of technical expertise among stranding network personnel varies widely as does the ability to recognize signs of fishery interactions.

Table 1. Pygmy sperm whale (*Kogia breviceps*) strandings along the U.S. Gulf of Mexico coast, 1999-2003.

State	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	TOTAL
Alabama	0	0	0	0	0	0
Florida	0	0	2 <sup>1</sup>	2	3	7
Louisiana	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mississippi	0	0	0	0	0	0
Texas	0	1	1	2	1	5
<b>Total</b>	0	1	3	4	4	12

<sup>1</sup> Florida mass stranding of 2 animals in January 2001



## STATUS OF STOCK

The status of dwarf sperm whales in the northern Gulf of Mexico, relative to OSP, is unknown. The species is not listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The total fishery-related mortality and serious injury for this stock is unknown, but assumed to be less than 10% of the calculated PBR and can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. This is not a strategic stock because average annual fishery-related mortality and serious injury does not exceed PBR.

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NMFS, Southeast Fisheries Science Center, 75 Virginia Beach Dr., Miami, FL 33149.

## RISSE'S DOLPHIN (*Grampus griseus*): Northern Gulf of Mexico Stock

### STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

Risso's dolphin is distributed worldwide in tropical to warm temperate waters (Leatherwood and Reeves 1983). Risso's dolphins in the northern Gulf of Mexico occur throughout oceanic waters but are concentrated in continental slope waters (Baumgartner 1997). Risso's dolphins were seen in all seasons during GulfCet aerial surveys of the northern Gulf of Mexico between 1992 and 1998 (Hansen *et al.* 1996; Mullin and Hoggard 2000).

The Gulf of Mexico population is provisionally being considered a separate stock for management purposes, although there is currently no information to differentiate this stock from the Atlantic Ocean stock(s). Additional morphological, genetic and/or behavioral data are needed to provide further information on stock delineation.

### POPULATION SIZE

Estimates of abundance were derived through the application of distance sampling analysis (Buckland *et al.* 2001) and the computer program DISTANCE (Thomas *et al.* 1998) to sighting data. From 1991 through 1994, line-transect vessel surveys were conducted during spring in the northern Gulf of Mexico from the 200m isobath to the seaward extent of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). Survey effort-weighted estimated average abundance of Risso's dolphins for all surveys combined was 2,749 (CV=0.27) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). As recommended in the GAMMS Workshop Report (Wade and Angliss 1997), estimates older than 8 years are deemed unreliable, and therefore should not be used for PBR determinations.

Similar surveys were conducted during April/May from 1996 to 2001 (excluding 1998) in oceanic waters of the northern Gulf of Mexico, using NOAA ships *Oregon II* (1996, 1997, 1999) and *Gordon Gunter* (2000, 2001). Estimates for all

oceanic strata were summed, as survey effort was not uniformly distributed, to calculate a total estimate for the entire northern Gulf of Mexico oceanic waters (Figure 1; Mullin and Fulling 2004). Due to limited survey effort in any given year, survey effort was pooled across all years to develop an average abundance estimate.

The estimate of abundance for Risso's dolphins in oceanic waters, pooled from 1996 to 2001, is 2,169 (CV=0.32) (Mullin and Fulling 2004), which is the best available abundance estimate for this species in the northern Gulf of Mexico.

### Minimum Population Estimate

The minimum population estimate is the lower limit of the two-tailed 60% confidence interval of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate. This is equivalent to the 20th percentile of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate as specified by Wade and Angliss (1997). The best estimate of abundance for Risso's dolphins is 2,169 (CV=0.32). The minimum population estimate for the northern Gulf of Mexico is 1,668 Risso's dolphins.

### Current Population Trend

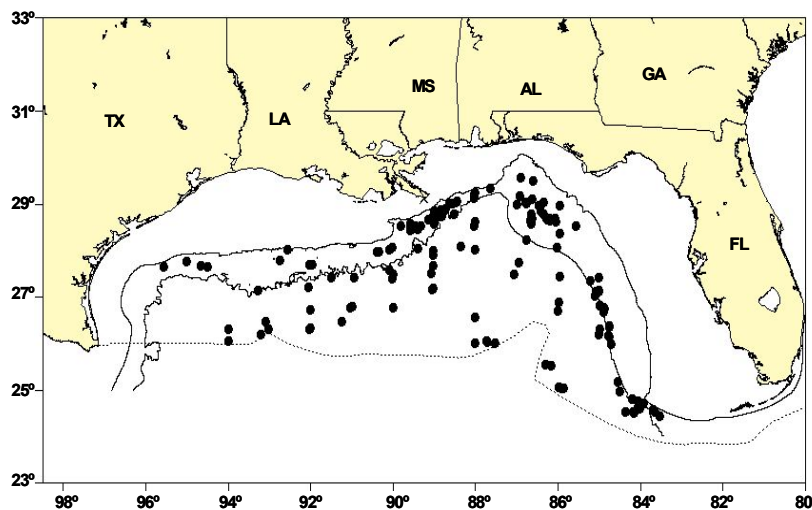


Figure 1. Distribution of Risso's dolphin sightings from SEFSC vessel surveys during 1996-2001. All the on-effort sightings are shown, though not all were used to estimate abundance. Solid lines indicate the 100m and 1,000m isobaths and the dotted line indicates the offshore extent of the U.S. EEZ.

There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The pooled abundance estimate for 1996-2001 of 1,777 (CV=0.34) and that for 1991-1994 of 2,749 (CV=0.27) are not significantly different ( $P>0.05$ ), but due to the precision of the estimates, the power to detect a difference is relatively low.

#### **CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES**

Current and maximum net productivity rates are unknown for this stock. For purposes of this assessment, the maximum net productivity rate was assumed to be 0.04. This value is based on theoretical modeling showing that cetacean populations may not grow at rates much greater than 4% given the constraints of their reproductive history (Barlow *et al.* 1995).

#### **POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL**

Potential biological removal level (PBR) is the product of the minimum population size, one half the maximum net productivity rate and a recovery factor (MMPA Sec. 3.16 U.S.C. 1362; Wade and Angliss 1997). The minimum population size is 1,668. The maximum productivity rate is 0.04, the default value for cetaceans. The “recovery” factor, which accounts for endangered, depleted, threatened stocks, or stocks of unknown status relative to optimum sustainable population (OSP), is assumed to be 0.5 because the stock is of unknown status. PBR for the northern Gulf of Mexico Risso’s dolphin is 17.

#### **ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY**

There has been no reported fishing-related mortality of a Risso’s dolphin during 1998-2003 (Yeung 1999; Yeung 2001; Garrison 2003; Garrison and Richards 2004).

#### **Fisheries Information**

The level of past or current, direct, human-caused mortality of Risso’s dolphins in the northern Gulf of Mexico is unknown. This species has been taken in the U.S. longline swordfish/tuna fishery in the northern Gulf of Mexico and in the U.S. Atlantic (Lee *et al.* 1994). Pelagic swordfish, tunas and billfish are the targets of the longline fishery operating in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. There were no reports of mortality or serious injury to Risso’s dolphins by this fishery during 1998-2003 (Yeung 1999; Yeung 2001; Garrison 2003; Garrison and Richards 2004). One Risso's dolphin was observed taken and released alive during 1992; the extent of injury to the animal was unknown (SEFSC, unpublished data). One lethal take of a Risso's dolphin by the fishery was observed in the Gulf of Mexico during 1993 (SEFSC, unpublished data). Estimated average annual fishery-related mortality and serious injury attributable to the longline swordfish/tuna fishery in the Gulf of Mexico during 1992-1993 was 19 Risso’s dolphins (CV=0.20).

#### **Other Mortality**

There were 2 reported strandings of Risso’s dolphin in the Gulf of Mexico during 1999-2003. There was no evidence of human interactions for these stranded animals. Stranding data probably underestimate the extent of fishery-related mortality and serious injury because not all of the marine mammals which die or are seriously injured in fishery interactions wash ashore, not all that wash ashore are discovered, reported or investigated, nor will all of those that do wash ashore necessarily show signs of entanglement or other fishery interaction. Finally, the level of technical expertise among stranding network personnel varies widely as does the ability to recognize signs of fishery interactions.

#### **STATUS OF STOCK**

The status of Risso’s dolphins in the northern Gulf of Mexico, relative to OSP, is unknown. The species is not listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The total fishery-related mortality and serious injury for this stock is unknown, but assumed to be less than 10% of the calculated PBR and can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. This is not a strategic stock because average annual fishery-related mortality and serious injury does not exceed PBR.

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## ROUGH-TOOTHED DOLPHIN (*Steno bredanensis*): Northern Gulf of Mexico Stock

### STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

The rough-toothed dolphin is distributed worldwide in tropical to warm temperate waters (Leatherwood and Reeves 1983; Miyazaki and Perrin 1994). Rough-toothed dolphins occur in both oceanic and continental shelf waters in the northern Gulf of Mexico (Fulling *et al.* 2003; Mullin and Fulling 2004). Rough-toothed dolphins were seen in all seasons during GulfCet aerial surveys of the northern Gulf of Mexico between 1992 and 1998 (Hansen *et al.* 1996; Mullin and Hoggard 2000).

The Gulf of Mexico population is provisionally being considered 1 stock for management purposes, although there is currently no information to differentiate this stock from the Atlantic Ocean stock(s). Additional morphological, genetic and/or behavioral data are needed to provide further information on stock delineation.

### POPULATION SIZE

Estimates of abundance were derived through the application of distance sampling analysis (Buckland *et al.* 2001) and the computer program DISTANCE (Thomas *et al.* 1998) to sighting data. From 1991 through 1994, line-transect vessel surveys were conducted during spring in the northern Gulf of Mexico from the 200m isobath to the seaward extent of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). Survey effort-weighted estimated average abundance of rough-toothed dolphins for all surveys combined was 852 (CV= 0.31) (Hansen *et al.* 1995).

This was probably an underestimate and should be considered a partial stock estimate because the continental shelf areas were not entirely covered by either the vessel or GulfCet aerial surveys. As recommended in the GAMMS Workshop Report (Wade and Angliss 1997), estimates older than 8 years are deemed unreliable, and therefore should not be used for PBR determinations.

Data were collected from 1996 to 2001 during spring and fall plankton surveys conducted from NOAA ships *Oregon II* (1996, 1997, 1999, 2000) and *Gordon Gunter* (1998, 1999, 2000, 2001).

Tracklines, which were perpendicular to the bathymetry, covered shelf waters from 20 to 200m deep in the fall of 1998 and 1999 (Figure 1 and Table 1; Fulling *et al.* 2003). Surveys were also conducted during April/May from 1996 to 2001 (excluding 1998) in oceanic waters of the northern Gulf of Mexico from 200m to the offshore extent of the U.S. EEZ. Estimates for all oceanic strata were summed, as survey effort was not uniformly distributed, to calculate a total estimate for the entire northern Gulf of Mexico oceanic waters (Figure 1 and Table 1; Mullin and Fulling 2004). Due to limited survey effort in any given year, survey effort was pooled across all years to develop an average abundance estimate for both continental shelf and oceanic waters.

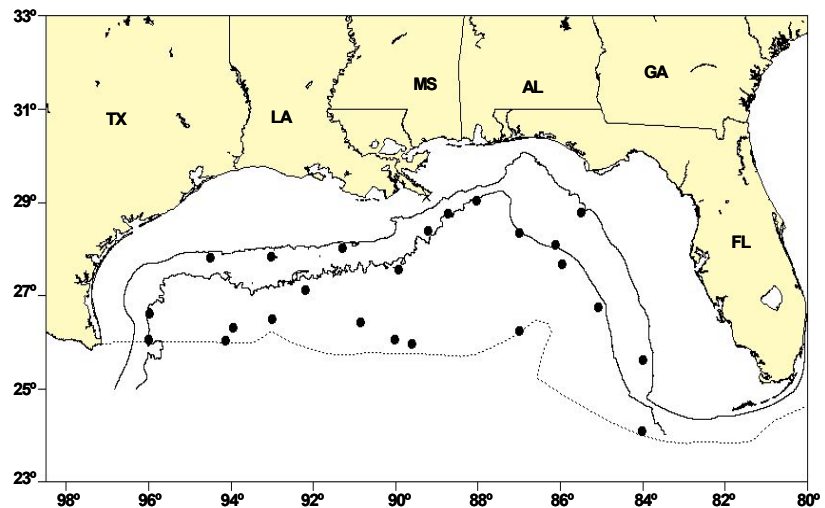


Figure 1. Distribution of rough-toothed dolphin sightings from SEFSC spring and fall vessel surveys during 1996-2001. All the on-effort sightings are shown, though not all were used to estimate abundance. Solid lines indicate the 100m and 1,000m isobaths and the dotted line shows the offshore extent of the U.S. EEZ.

Table 1. Abundance estimates ( $N_{best}$ ) and Coefficient of Variation (CV) of rough-toothed dolphins in the

northern U.S. Gulf of Mexico outer continental shelf (OCS) (waters 20-200m deep) during fall 1998-2001 and oceanic waters (200m to the offshore extent of the EEZ) during spring 1996-2001 (excluding 1998).

Month/Year	Area	N <sub>best</sub>	CV
Fall 1998-2001	Outer Continental Shelf	1,238	0.65
Spring 1996-2001	Oceanic	985	0.44
<b>Spring &amp; Fall 1996-2001</b>	<b>OCS &amp; Oceanic</b>	<b>2,469</b>	<b>0.40</b>

The combined estimated abundance of rough-toothed dolphins, pooled from 1998 through 2001, for the outer continental shelf shipboard surveys was 1,238 (CV=0.65) (Fulling *et al.* 2003). The estimate of abundance for rough-toothed dolphins in oceanic waters, pooled from 1996 through 2001, is 985 (CV=0.44) (Mullin and Fulling 2004).

The best available abundance estimate for the rough-toothed dolphin in the northern Gulf of Mexico is the combined estimate of abundance for both the outer continental shelf and oceanic waters from 1996 to 2001, which is 2,223 (CV=0.41). This estimate is considered the best because these surveys have the most complete coverage of the species' habitat. This species was observed in shelf waters, with 2 sightings occurring off the coast of Texas and 1 sighting off the southern Florida Panhandle (Fulling *et al.* 2003). Group sizes recorded for rough-toothed dolphins in shelf waters were 8, 11 and 20 individuals.

#### **Minimum Population Estimate**

The minimum population estimate is the lower limit of the two-tailed 60% confidence interval of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate. This is equivalent to the 20th percentile of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate as specified by Wade and Angliss (1997). The best estimate of abundance for rough-toothed dolphins is 2,223 (CV=0.41). The minimum population estimate for the northern Gulf of Mexico is 1,595 rough-toothed dolphins.

#### **Current Population Trend**

There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species.

#### **CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES**

Current and maximum net productivity rates are unknown for this stock. For purposes of this assessment, the maximum net productivity rate was assumed to be 0.04. This value is based on theoretical modeling showing that cetacean populations may not grow at rates much greater than 4% given the constraints of their reproductive history (Barlow *et al.* 1995).

#### **POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL**

Potential biological removal level (PBR) is the product of the minimum population size, one half the maximum net productivity rate and a "recovery" factor (MMPA Sec. 3.16 U.S.C. 1362; Wade and Angliss 1997). The minimum population size is 1,595 (CV=0.41). The maximum productivity rate is 0.04, the default value for cetaceans. The "recovery" factor, which accounts for endangered, depleted, threatened stocks, or stocks of unknown status relative to optimum sustainable population (OSP) is assumed to be 0.5 because the stock is of unknown status. PBR for the northern Gulf of Mexico rough-toothed dolphin is 16.

#### **ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY**

There were 2 documented strandings of rough-toothed dolphins in the northern Gulf of Mexico during 1987-1994 which were classified as likely caused by fishery interactions. There has been no reported fishing-related mortality of rough-toothed dolphins during 1998-2003 (Yeung 1999; Yeung 2001; Garrison 2003; Garrison and Richards 2004).

#### **Fisheries Information**

The level of past or current, direct, human-caused mortality of rough-toothed dolphins in the northern Gulf of Mexico is unknown. Pelagic swordfish, tunas and billfish are the targets of the longline fishery operating in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. There were no reports of mortality or serious injury to rough-toothed dolphins by this fishery in the Gulf of Mexico during 1998-2003 (Yeung 1999; Yeung 2001; Garrison 2003; Garrison and Richards

2004).

### Other Mortality

There were 22 stranded rough-toothed dolphins in the northern Gulf of Mexico during 1999-2003, including 1 mass stranding of 19 animals in February 2001 (Table 2). There was no evidence of human interactions for these stranded animals. Stranding data probably underestimate the extent of fishery-related mortality and serious injury because not all of the marine mammals which die or are seriously injured in fishery interactions wash ashore, not all that wash ashore are discovered, reported or investigated, nor will all of those that do wash ashore necessarily show signs of entanglement or other fishery interaction. Finally, the level of technical expertise among stranding network personnel varies widely as does the ability to recognize signs of fishery interactions.

Table 2. Rough-toothed dolphin (*Steno bredanensis*) strandings along the U.S. Gulf of Mexico coast, 1999-2003.

State	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	TOTAL
Alabama	0	0	0	0	0	0
Florida	0	1	19 <sup>1</sup>	1	1	22
Louisiana	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mississippi	0	0	0	0	0	0
Texas	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	0	1	19	1	1	22

<sup>1</sup> Florida mass stranding of 19 animals in February 2001

### STATUS OF STOCK

The status of rough-toothed dolphins in the northern Gulf of Mexico, relative to OSP, is unknown. The species is not listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The total fishery-related mortality and serious injury for this stock is unknown, but assumed to be less than 10% of the calculated PBR and can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. This is not a strategic stock because average annual fishery-related mortality and serious injury does not exceed PBR

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## SHORT-FINNED PILOT WHALE (*Globicephala macrorhynchus*): Northern Gulf of Mexico Stock

### STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

The short-finned pilot whale is distributed worldwide in tropical to temperate waters (Leatherwood and Reeves 1983). Sightings of these animals in the northern Gulf of Mexico occur primarily on the continental slope (Mullin and Fulling 2004). Short-finned pilot whales were seen in all seasons during GulfCet aerial surveys of the northern Gulf of Mexico between 1992 and 1998 (Hansen *et al.* 1996; Mullin and Hoggard 2000).

The Gulf of Mexico population is provisionally being considered a separate stock for management purposes, although there is currently no information to differentiate this stock from the Atlantic Ocean stock(s). Additional morphological, genetic and/or behavioral data are needed to provide further information on stock delineation.

### POPULATION SIZE

Estimates of abundance were derived through the application of distance sampling analysis (Buckland *et al.* 2001) and the computer program DISTANCE (Thomas *et al.* 1998) to sighting data. From 1991 through 1994, line-transect vessel surveys were conducted during spring in the northern Gulf of Mexico from the 200m isobath to the seaward extent of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). Survey effort-weighted estimated average abundance of short-finned pilot whales for all surveys combined was 353 (CV=0.89) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). As recommended in the GAMMS Workshop Report (Wade and Angliss 1997), estimates older than 8 years are deemed unreliable, and therefore should not be used for PBR determinations.

Similar surveys were conducted during April/May from 1996 to 2001 (excluding 1998) in oceanic waters of the northern Gulf of Mexico, using NOAA ships *Oregon II* (1996, 1997, 1999) and *Gordon Gunter* (2000, 2001). Estimates for all oceanic strata were summed, as survey effort was not uniformly distributed, to calculate a total estimate for the entire northern Gulf of Mexico oceanic waters (Figure 1; Mullin and Fulling 2004). Due to limited survey effort in any given year, survey effort was pooled across all years to develop an average abundance estimate.

The estimate of abundance for short-finned pilot whales in oceanic waters, pooled from 1996 to 2001, is 2,388 (CV=0.48) (Mullin and Fulling 2004), which is the best available abundance estimate for this species in the northern Gulf of Mexico.

### Minimum Population Estimate

The minimum population estimate is the lower limit of the two-tailed 60% confidence interval of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate. This is equivalent to the 20th percentile of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate as specified by Wade and Angliss (1997). The best estimate of abundance for short-finned pilot whales is 2,388 (CV=0.48). The minimum population estimate for the northern Gulf of Mexico is 1,628 short-finned

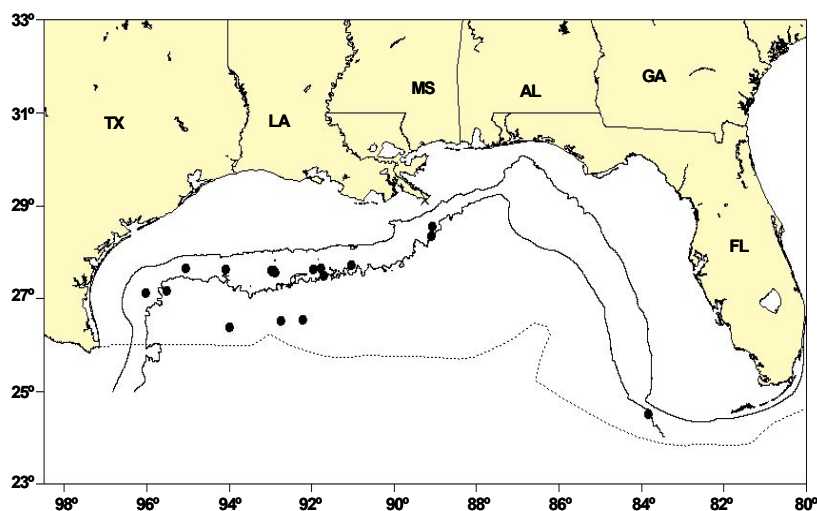


Figure 1. Distribution of short-finned pilot whale sightings from SEFSC spring vessel surveys during 1996-2001. All the on-effort sightings are shown, though not all were used to estimate abundance. Solid lines indicate the 100m and 1,000m isobaths and the dotted line indicates the offshore extent of the U.S. EEZ.

pilot whales.

### Current Population Trend

There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The pooled abundance estimate for 1996-2001 of 2,388 (CV=0.48) and that for 1991-1994 of 353 (CV=0.52) are not significantly different ( $P>0.05$ ), but due to the precision of the estimates, the power to detect a difference is low.

### CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES

Current and maximum net productivity rates are unknown for this stock. For purposes of this assessment, the maximum net productivity rate was assumed to be 0.04. This value is based on theoretical modeling showing that cetacean populations may not grow at rates much greater than 4% given the constraints of their reproductive history (Barlow *et al.* 1995).

### POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL

Potential biological removal level (PBR) is the product of the minimum population size, one half the maximum net productivity rate and a recovery factor (MMPA Sec. 3.16 U.S.C. 1362; Wade and Angliss 1997). The minimum population size is 1,628 (CV=0.48). The maximum productivity rate is 0.04, the default value for cetaceans. The “recovery” factor, which accounts for endangered, depleted, threatened stocks, or stocks of unknown status relative to optimum sustainable population (OSP), is assumed to be 0.5 because the stock is of unknown status. PBR for the northern Gulf of Mexico short-finned pilot whale is 16.

### ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY

There has been no reported fishing-related mortality of short-finned pilot whales during 1998-2003 (Yeung 1999; Yeung 2001; Garrison 2003; Garrison and Richards 2004).

### Fisheries Information

The level of past or current, direct, human-caused mortality of short-finned pilot whales in the northern Gulf of Mexico is unknown. Pelagic swordfish, tunas and billfish are the targets of the longline fishery operating in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. There were no recent reports of mortality or serious injury to short-finned pilot whales by this fishery. There was 1 logbook report of a fishery-related injury of a pilot whale in the northern Gulf of Mexico in 1991.

### Other Mortality

There were 2 reported mass strandings of short-finned pilot whales in the Gulf of Mexico during 1999-2003. Both mass strandings occurred in Florida. Two animals mass stranded in May 1999, and 9 animals in October 2001. One of the 9 animals from 2001 displayed evidence of human interactions; for the remaining animals there was no evidence of human interactions. Stranding data probably underestimate the extent of fishery-related mortality and serious injury because not all of the marine mammals which die or are seriously injured in fishery interactions wash ashore, not all that wash ashore are discovered, reported or investigated, nor will all of those that do wash ashore necessarily show signs of entanglement or other fishery interaction. Finally, the level of technical expertise among stranding network personnel varies widely as does the ability to recognize signs of fishery interactions.

Table 1. Short-finned pilot whale (*Globicephala macrorhynchus*) strandings along the U.S. Gulf of Mexico coast, 1999-2003.

State	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	TOTAL
Alabama	0	0	0	0	0	0
Florida	2 <sup>1</sup>	0	9 <sup>2</sup>	0	0	11
Louisiana	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mississippi	0	0	0	0	0	0
Texas	0	0	0	0	0	0

Total	2	0	9	0	0	11
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<sup>1</sup> Florida mass stranding of 2 animals in May 1999

<sup>2</sup> Florida mass stranding of 9 animals in October 2001

## STATUS OF STOCK

The status of short-finned pilot whales in the northern Gulf of Mexico, relative to OSP, is unknown. The species is not listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The total fishery-related mortality and serious injury for this stock is unknown, but assumed to be less than 10% of the calculated PBR and can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. This is not a strategic stock because average annual fishery-related mortality and serious injury does not exceed PBR.

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## SPERM WHALE (*Physeter macrocephalus*): Northern Gulf of Mexico Stock

### STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

Sperm whales are found throughout the world's oceans in deep waters to the edge of the ice at both poles (Leatherwood and Reeves 1983; Rice 1989; Whitehead 2002). Seasonal aerial surveys confirm that sperm whales are present in the northern Gulf of Mexico in all seasons (Mullin *et al.* 1994; Hansen *et al.* 1996; Mullin and Hoggard 2000).

There has been speculation, based on year-round occurrence of strandings, opportunistic sightings and whaling catches, that sperm whales in the Gulf of Mexico may constitute a distinct stock (Schmidly 1981). The Gulf of Mexico population is provisionally being considered a separate stock for management purposes, although there is currently no information to differentiate this stock from the Atlantic Ocean stock(s). Additional morphological, genetic and/or behavioral data are needed to provide further information on stock delineation.

Disturbance by anthropogenic noise may prove to be an important habitat issue in some areas of this population's range, notably in areas of oil and gas activities and/or where shipping activity is high. Limited studies are currently being conducted to address this issue and its impact, if any, on this and other marine species. The potential impact, if any, of coastal pollution may be an issue for this species in portions of its habitat, though little is known on this to date.

### POPULATION SIZE

Estimates of abundance were derived through the application of distance sampling analysis (Buckland *et al.* 2001) and the computer program DISTANCE (Thomas *et al.* 1998) to sighting data. From 1991 through 1994, line-transect vessel surveys were conducted during spring in the northern Gulf of Mexico from the 200m isobath to the seaward extent of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). Survey effort-weighted estimated average abundance of sperm whales for all surveys combined was 530 (CV=0.31) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). As recommended in the GAMMS Workshop Report (Wade and Angliss 1997), estimates older than 8 years are deemed unreliable, and therefore should not be used for PBR determinations.

Similar surveys were conducted during April/May from 1996 to

2001 (excluding 1998) in oceanic waters of the northern Gulf of Mexico, using NOAA ships *Oregon II* (1996, 1997, 1999) and *Gordon Gunter* (2000, 2001). Estimates for all oceanic strata were summed, as survey effort was not uniformly distributed, to calculate a total estimate for the entire northern Gulf of Mexico oceanic waters (Figure 1; Mullin and Fulling 2004). Due to limited survey effort in any given year, survey effort was pooled across all years to develop an average abundance estimate. The estimate of abundance for sperm whales in oceanic waters, pooled from 1996 to 2001, is 1,349 (CV=0.23) (Mullin and Fulling 2004), which is the best available abundance estimate for this species in the northern Gulf of Mexico.

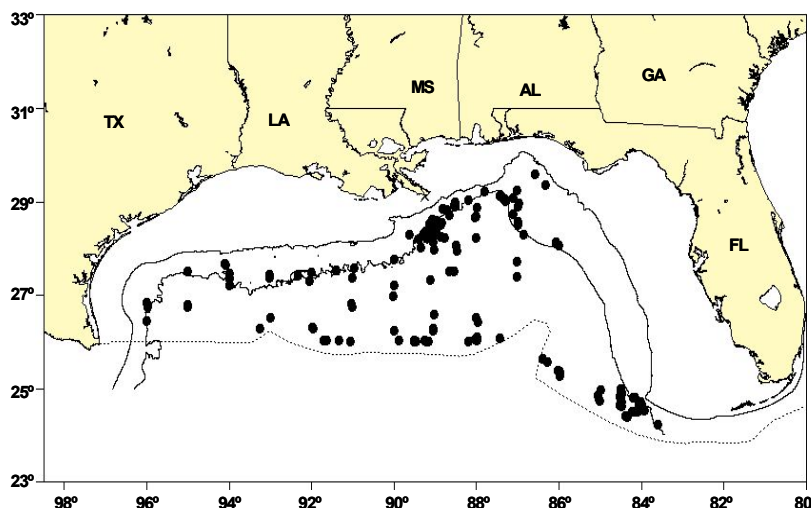


Figure 1. Distribution of sperm whale sightings from SEFSC spring vessel surveys during 1996-2001. All the on-effort sightings are shown, though not all were used to estimate abundance. Solid lines indicate the 100m and 1,000m isobaths and the dotted line indicates the offshore extent of the U.S. EEZ.

### Minimum Population Estimate

The minimum population estimate is the lower limit of the two-tailed 60% confidence interval of the log-

normal distributed abundance estimate. This is equivalent to the 20th percentile of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate as specified by Wade and Angliss (1997). The best estimate of abundance for sperm whales is 1,349 (CV=0.23). The minimum population estimate for the northern Gulf of Mexico is 1,114 sperm whales.

### Current Population Trend

There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The pooled abundance estimate for 1996-2001 of 1,349 (CV=0.29) and that for 1991-1994 of 530 (CV=0.31) are not significantly different ( $P>0.05$ ), but due to the precision of the estimates, the power to detect a difference is relatively low.

### CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES

Current and maximum net productivity rates are unknown for this stock. For purposes of this assessment, the maximum net productivity rate was assumed to be 0.04. This value is based on theoretical modeling showing that cetacean populations may not grow at rates much greater than 4% given the constraints of their reproductive history (Barlow *et al.* 1995).

### POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL

Potential biological removal level (PBR) is the product of the minimum population size, one half the maximum net productivity rate and a recovery factor (MMPA Sec. 3.16 U.S.C. 1362; Wade and Angliss 1997). The minimum population size is 1,114 (CV=0.23). The maximum productivity rate is 0.04, the default value for cetaceans. The "recovery" factor, which accounts for endangered, depleted, threatened stocks, or stocks of unknown status relative to optimum sustainable population (OSP), is assumed to be 0.1 because the sperm whale is an endangered species. PBR for the northern Gulf of Mexico sperm whale is 2.2.

### ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY

There has been no reported fishing-related mortality of a sperm whale during 1998-2003 (Yeung 1999; Yeung 2001; Garrison 2003; Garrison and Richards 2004).

A commercial fishery for sperm whales operated in the Gulf of Mexico in deep waters between the Mississippi River delta and DeSoto Canyon during the late 1700's to the early 1900's (Mullin *et al.* 1991), but the exact number of whales taken is not known (Townsend 1935; Lowery 1974). Townsend (1935) reported many records of sperm whales from April through July in the north-central Gulf (Petersen and Hoggard 1996).

### Fisheries Information

The level of past or current, direct, human-caused mortality of sperm whales in the northern Gulf of Mexico is unknown. Pelagic swordfish, tunas and billfish are the targets of the longline fishery operating in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. There were no reports of mortality or serious injury to sperm whales by this fishery.

### Other Mortality

A total of 9 sperm whale strandings were documented in the northern Gulf of Mexico during 1999-2003 (Table 1). There was no evidence of human interactions for these stranded animals. Stranding data probably underestimate the extent of fishery-related mortality and serious injury because not all of the marine mammals which die or are seriously injured in fishery interactions wash ashore, not all that wash ashore are discovered, reported or investigated, nor will all of those that do wash ashore necessarily show signs of entanglement or other fishery interaction. Finally, the level of technical expertise among stranding network personnel varies widely as does the ability to recognize signs of fishery interactions.

Table 1. Sperm whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*) strandings along the U.S. Gulf of Mexico coast, 1999-2003.

State	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	TOTAL
Alabama	0	0	0	0	0	0
Florida	1	2	1	1	1	6
Louisiana	1	0	0	0	1	2
Mississippi	0	0	0	0	0	0

Texas	0	1	0	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	2	3	1	1	2	9

## STATUS OF STOCK

The status of sperm whales in the northern Gulf of Mexico, relative to OSP, is unknown. This species is listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The total fishery-related mortality and serious injury for this stock is unknown, but assumed to be less than 10% of the calculated PBR and can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. This is a strategic stock because the sperm whale is listed as an endangered species under the ESA.

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## SPINNER DOLPHIN (*Stenella longirostris*): Northern Gulf of Mexico Stock

### STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

The spinner dolphin is distributed worldwide in tropical to temperate oceanic waters (Leatherwood and Reeves 1983; Perrin and Gilpatrick 1994). Sightings of these animals in the northern Gulf of Mexico occur in oceanic waters (Mullin and Fulling 2004). Spinner dolphins were seen in all seasons during GulfCet aerial surveys of the northern Gulf of Mexico between 1992 and 1998 (Hansen *et al.* 1996; Mullin and Hoggard 2000).

The Gulf of Mexico population is provisionally being considered a separate stock for management purposes, although there is currently no information to differentiate this stock from the Atlantic Ocean stock(s). Additional morphological, genetic and/or behavioral data are needed to provide further information on stock delineation.

### POPULATION SIZE

Estimates of abundance were derived through the application of distance sampling analysis (Buckland *et al.* 2001) and the computer program DISTANCE (Thomas *et al.* 1998) to sighting data. From 1991 through 1994, line-transect vessel surveys were conducted during spring in the northern Gulf of Mexico from the 200m isobath to the seaward extent of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). Survey effort-weighted estimated average abundance of spinner dolphins for all surveys combined was 6,316 (CV=0.43) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). As recommended in the GAMMS Workshop Report (Wade and Angliss 1997), estimates older than 8 years are deemed unreliable, and therefore should not be used for PBR determinations.

Similar surveys were conducted during April/May from 1996 to 2001 (excluding 1998) in oceanic waters of the northern Gulf of Mexico, using NOAA ships *Oregon II* (1996, 1997, 1999) and *Gordon Gunter* (2000, 2001). Estimates for all oceanic strata were summed, as survey effort was not uniformly distributed, to calculate a total estimate for the entire northern Gulf of Mexico oceanic waters (Figure 1; Mullin and Fulling 2004). Due to limited survey effort in any given year, survey effort was pooled across all years to develop an average abundance estimate.

The estimate of abundance for spinner dolphins in oceanic waters, pooled from 1996 to 2001, is 11,971 (CV=0.71) (Mullin and Fulling 2004), which is the best available abundance estimate for this species in the northern Gulf of Mexico.

### Minimum Population Estimate

The minimum population estimate is the lower limit of the two-tailed 60% confidence interval of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate. This is equivalent to the 20th percentile of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate as specified by Wade and Angliss (1997). The best estimate of abundance for spinner dolphins is 11,971 (CV=0.71). The minimum population estimate for the northern Gulf of Mexico is 6,990 spinner dolphins.

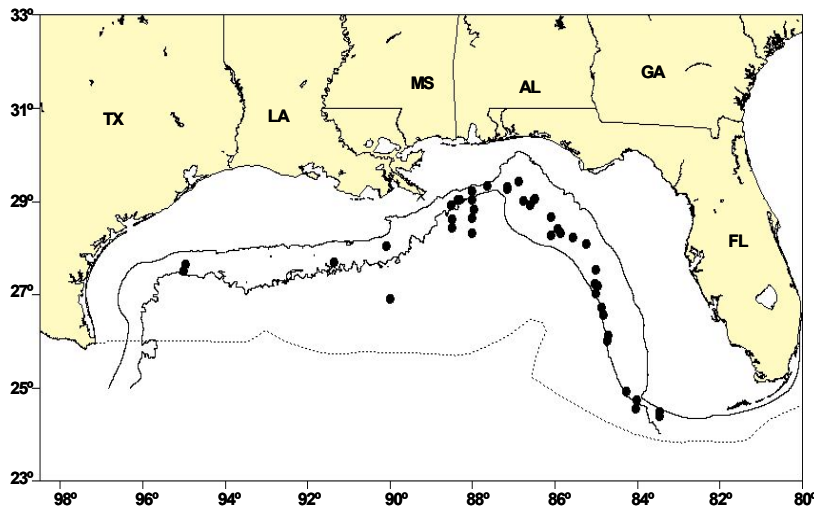


Figure 1. Distribution of spinner dolphin sightings from SEFSC spring vessel surveys during 1996-2001. All the on-effort sightings are shown, though not all were used to estimate abundance. Solid lines indicate the 100m and 1,000m isobaths and the dotted line indicates the offshore extent of the U.S. EEZ.

### Current Population Trend

There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The pooled abundance estimate for 1996-2001 of 11,971 (CV=0.71) and that for 1991-1994 of 6,316 (CV=0.43) are not significantly different ( $P>0.05$ ), but due to the precision of the estimates, the power to detect a difference is low.

### CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES

Current and maximum net productivity rates are unknown for this stock. For purposes of this assessment, the maximum net productivity rate was assumed to be 0.04. This value is based on theoretical modeling showing that cetacean populations may not grow at rates much greater than 4% given the constraints of their reproductive history (Barlow *et al.* 1995).

### POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL

Potential biological removal level (PBR) is the product of the minimum population size, one half the maximum net productivity rate and a recovery factor (MMPA Sec. 3.16 U.S.C. 1362; Wade and Angliss 1997). The minimum population size is 6,990 (CV=0.71). The maximum productivity rate is 0.04, the default value for cetaceans. The “recovery” factor, which accounts for endangered, depleted, threatened stocks, or stocks of unknown status relative to optimum sustainable population (OSP), is assumed to be 0.5 because the stock is of unknown status. PBR for the northern Gulf of Mexico spinner dolphin is 70.

### ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY

There has been no reported fishing-related mortality of spinner dolphins during 1998-2003 (Yeung 1999; Yeung 2001; Garrison 2003; Garrison and Richards 2004).

### Fisheries Information

The level of past or current, direct, human-caused mortality of spinner dolphins in the northern Gulf of Mexico is unknown. Pelagic swordfish, tunas and billfish are the targets of the longline fishery operating in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. There were no reports of mortality or serious injury to spinner dolphins by this fishery.

### Other Mortality

There were 5 reported strandings of spinner dolphins in the Gulf of Mexico during 1999-2003 (Table 1). There was evidence of human interaction for 1 of the 2003 Texas stranded animals. Stranding data probably underestimate the extent of fishery-related mortality and serious injury because not all of the marine mammals which die or are seriously injured in fishery interactions wash ashore, not all that wash ashore are discovered, reported or investigated, nor will all of those that do wash ashore necessarily show signs of entanglement or other fishery interaction. Finally, the level of technical expertise among stranding network personnel varies widely as does the ability to recognize signs of fishery interactions.

Table 1. Spinner dolphin (*Stenella longirostris*) strandings along the U.S. Gulf of Mexico coast, 1999-2003.

State	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	TOTAL
Alabama	0	0	0	0	2	2
Florida	0	0	0	0	0	0
Louisiana	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mississippi	0	0	0	0	0	0
Texas	0	1	0	0	2	3
<b>Total</b>	0	1	0	0	4	5

### STATUS OF STOCK

The status of spinner dolphins in the northern Gulf of Mexico, relative to OSP, is unknown. The species is not listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. There are insufficient data to determine

the population trends for this species. The total fishery-related mortality and serious injury for this stock is unknown, but assumed to be less than 10% of the calculated PBR and can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. This is not a strategic stock because average annual fishery-related mortality and serious injury does not exceed PBR.

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## ATLANTIC SPOTTED DOLPHIN (*Stenella frontalis*): Northern Gulf of Mexico Stock

### STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

There are two species of spotted dolphin in the Atlantic Ocean, the Atlantic spotted dolphin (*Stenella frontalis*) and the pantropical spotted dolphin (*S. attenuata*) (Perrin *et al.* 1987). The Atlantic spotted dolphin occurs in two forms which may be distinct sub-species (Perrin *et al.* 1987, 1994; Rice 1998): the large, heavily spotted form which inhabits the continental shelf and is usually found inside or near the 200m isobath; and the smaller, less spotted island and offshore form which occurs in the Atlantic Ocean but is not known to occur in the Gulf of Mexico (Fulling *et al.* 2003; Mullin and Fulling 2003; Mullin and Fulling 2004). Where they co-occur, the offshore form of the Atlantic spotted dolphin and the pantropical spotted dolphin can be difficult to differentiate at sea.

The Atlantic spotted dolphin is endemic to the Atlantic Ocean in temperate to tropical waters (Perrin *et al.* 1987, 1994). In the Gulf of Mexico, Atlantic spotted dolphins occur primarily from continental shelf waters 10-200m deep to slope waters <500m deep (Fulling *et al.* 2003; Mullin and Fulling 2004). Atlantic spotted dolphins were seen in all seasons during GulfCet aerial surveys of the northern Gulf of Mexico from 1992 to 1998 (Hansen *et al.* 1996; Mullin and Hoggard 2003). It has been suggested that this species may move inshore seasonally during spring, but data supporting this hypothesis are limited (Caldwell and Caldwell 1966; Fritts *et al.* 1983).

In a recent study, Bero (2001) presented strong genetic support for differentiation between Gulf of Mexico and western North Atlantic management stocks using both mitochondrial and nuclear markers. However, this study did not test for further population subdivision within the Gulf of Mexico.

### POPULATION SIZE

Estimates of abundance were derived through the application of distance sampling analysis (Buckland *et al.* 2001) and the computer program DISTANCE (Thomas *et al.* 1998) to sighting data. From 1991 through 1994, line-transect vessel surveys were conducted during spring in the northern Gulf of Mexico from the 200m isobath to the seaward extent of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). Survey effort-weighted estimated average abundance of Atlantic spotted dolphins for all surveys combined was 3,213

(CV=0.44) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). This is probably an underestimate and should be considered a partial stock estimate because the continental shelf was not entirely covered during these surveys. As recommended in the GAMMS Workshop Report (Wade and Angliss 1997), estimates older than 8 years are deemed unreliable, and therefore should not be used for PBR determinations.

Data were collected from 1996 to 2001 during spring and fall plankton surveys conducted from NOAA ships *Oregon II* (1996, 1997, 1999, 2000) and *Gordon Gunter* (1998, 2000, 2001). Tracklines, which were perpendicular to the bathymetry, covered shelf waters from the 20m to the 200m isobaths in the fall of 1998 and 1999 (Figure 1, Table 1; Fulling *et al.* 2003). Surveys were also conducted from April to May 1996 to 2001 (excluding 1998) in oceanic waters of the northern Gulf of Mexico from 200m to the offshore extent of the U.S. EEZ. Estimates for all oceanic strata were summed, as survey effort was not uniformly distributed, to calculate a total estimate for the entire northern Gulf of Mexico oceanic waters (Figure 1, Table 1; Mullin and Fulling 2004).

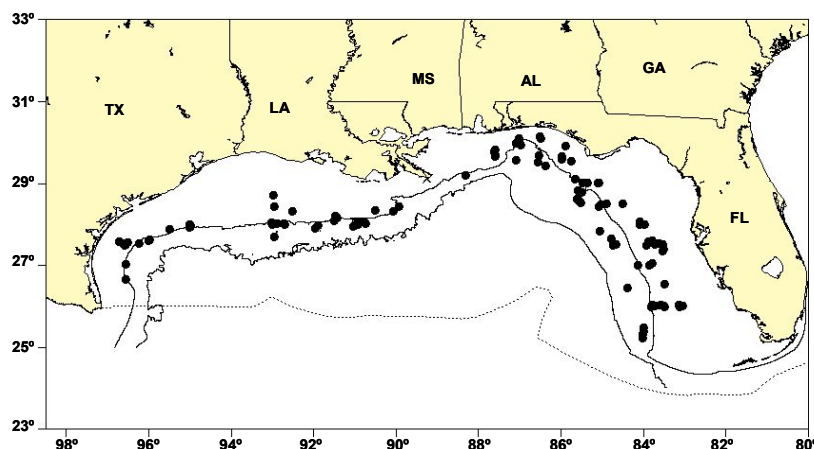


Figure 1. Distribution of Atlantic spotted dolphin sightings from SEFSC spring and fall vessel surveys during 1996-2001. All the on-effort sightings are shown, though not all were used to estimate abundance. Solid lines indicate the 100m and 1,000m isobaths and the dotted line shows the offshore extent of the U.S. EEZ.

Due to limited survey effort in any given year, survey effort was pooled across all years to develop an average abundance estimate for both areas.

Table 1. Abundance estimates ( $N_{best}$ ) and Coefficient of Variation (CV) of Atlantic spotted dolphins in the northern U.S. Gulf of Mexico outer continental shelf (OCS) (waters 20-200m deep) during fall 1998-2001 and oceanic waters (200m to the offshore extent of the EEZ) during spring 1996-2001 (excluding 1998).

Month/Year	Area	$N_{best}$	CV
Fall 1998-2001	Outer Continental Shelf	30,772	0.27
Spring 1996-2001	Oceanic	175	0.84
<b>Spring &amp; Fall 1996-2001</b>	<b>OCS &amp; Oceanic</b>	<b>30,947</b>	<b>0.27</b>

The combined estimated abundance of Atlantic spotted dolphins, pooled from 1998 through 2001, for the outer continental shelf shipboard surveys was 30,772 (CV=0.27) (Fulling *et al.* 2003). The estimate of abundance for Atlantic spotted dolphins in oceanic waters, pooled from 1996 through 2001, is 175 (CV=0.84) (Mullin and Fulling 2004).

The best available abundance estimate for the Atlantic spotted dolphin in the northern Gulf of Mexico is the combined estimate of abundance for both the outer continental shelf and oceanic waters from 1996 to 2001, which is 30,947 (CV=0.27). This estimate is considered the best because these surveys have the most complete coverage of the species' habitat.

#### Minimum Population Estimate

The minimum population estimate is the lower limit of the two-tailed 60% confidence interval of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate. This is equivalent to the 20th percentile of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate as specified by Wade and Angliss (1997). The best estimate of abundance for Atlantic spotted dolphins is 30,947 (CV=0.27). The minimum population estimate for the northern Gulf of Mexico is 24,752 Atlantic spotted dolphins.

#### Current Population Trend

There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species.

#### CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES

Current and maximum net productivity rates are unknown for this stock. For purposes of this assessment, the maximum net productivity rate was assumed to be 0.04. This value is based on theoretical modeling showing that cetacean populations may not grow at rates much greater than 4% given the constraints of their reproductive history (Barlow *et al.* 1995).

#### POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL

Potential biological removal level (PBR) is the product of the minimum population size, one half the maximum net productivity rate and a "recovery" factor (MMPA Sec. 3.16 U.S.C. 1362; Wade and Angliss 1997). The minimum population size is 24,752. The maximum productivity rate is 0.04, the default value for cetaceans. The "recovery" factor, which accounts for endangered, depleted, threatened stocks, or stocks of unknown status relative to optimum sustainable population (OSP), is assumed to be 0.5 because the stock is of unknown status. PBR for the northern Gulf of Mexico Atlantic spotted dolphin is 248.

#### ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY

There has been no reported fishing-related mortality of a spotted dolphin during 1998-2003 (Yeung 1999; Yeung 2001; Garrison 2003; Garrison and Richards 2004).

#### Fisheries Information

The level of past or current, direct, human-caused mortality of Atlantic spotted dolphins in the northern Gulf of Mexico is unknown; however, interactions between spotted dolphins and fisheries have been observed in the northern Gulf of Mexico. Pelagic swordfish, tunas and billfish are the targets of the longline fishery operating in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. There were 2 observed incidental takes and releases of spotted dolphins in the Gulf of Mexico

during 1994, but no recent reported takes of Atlantic spotted dolphins by this fishery in the Gulf of Mexico. Either spotted dolphin species may have been involved in the observed fishery-related mortality and serious injury incidents, but because of the uncertainty in species identification by fishery observers, they cannot currently be separated. Estimated average annual fishing-related mortality and serious injury of spotted dolphins attributable to this fishery during 1991-1993 was 1.5 annually (CV=0.33).

### Other Mortality

A total of 7 Atlantic spotted dolphins stranded in the Gulf of Mexico during 1999-2003 (Table 2). There were no indications of human interactions in any of these stranded animals. There were 2 documented strandings of Atlantic spotted dolphins in the northern Gulf of Mexico during 1987-1994 which were classified as likely caused by fishery interactions. Stranding data probably underestimate the extent of fishery-related mortality and serious injury because not all of the marine mammals which die or are seriously injured in fishery interactions wash ashore, not all that wash ashore are discovered, reported or investigated, nor will all of those that do wash ashore necessarily show signs of entanglement or other fishery-interaction. Finally, the level of technical expertise among stranding network personnel varies widely as does the ability to recognize signs of fishery interactions.

Table 2. Atlantic spotted dolphin (*Stenella frontalis*) strandings along the U.S. Gulf of Mexico coast, 1999-2003.

State	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	TOTAL
Alabama	0	0	0	0	1	1
Florida	2	2	0	0	1	5
Louisiana	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mississippi	0	0	0	0	0	0
Texas	0	1	0	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>

### STATUS OF STOCK

The status of Atlantic spotted dolphins in the northern Gulf of Mexico, relative to OSP, is unknown. The species is not listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The total fishery-related mortality and serious injury for this stock is unknown, but assumed to be less than 10% of the calculated PBR and can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. This is not a strategic stock because average annual fishery-related mortality and serious injury does not exceed PBR.

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## STRIPED DOLPHIN (*Stenella coeruleoalba*): Northern Gulf of Mexico Stock

### STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

The striped dolphin is distributed worldwide in tropical to temperate oceanic waters (Leatherwood and Reeves 1983; Perrin *et al.* 1994). Sightings of these animals in the northern Gulf of Mexico occur in oceanic waters (Mullin and Fulling 2004). Striped dolphins were seen in all seasons during GulfCet aerial surveys of the northern Gulf of Mexico between 1992 and 1998 (Hansen *et al.* 1996; Mullin and Hoggard 2000).

The Gulf of Mexico population is provisionally being considered a separate stock for management purposes, although there is currently no information to differentiate this stock from the Atlantic Ocean stock(s). Additional morphological, genetic and/or behavioral data are needed to provide further information on stock delineation.

### POPULATION SIZE

Estimates of abundance were derived through the application of distance sampling analysis (Buckland *et al.* 2001) and the computer program DISTANCE (Thomas *et al.* 1998) to sighting data. From 1991 through 1994, line-transect vessel surveys were conducted during spring in the northern Gulf of Mexico from the 200m isobath to the seaward extent of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). Survey effort-weighted estimated average abundance of striped dolphins for all surveys combined was 4,858 (CV=0.44) (Hansen *et al.* 1995). As recommended in the GAMMS Workshop Report (Wade and Angliss 1997), estimates older than 8 years are deemed unreliable, and therefore should not be used for PBR determinations.

Similar surveys were conducted during April/May from 1996 to 2001 (excluding 1998) in oceanic waters of the northern Gulf of Mexico, using NOAA ships *Oregon II* (1996, 1997, 1999) and *Gordon Gunter* (2000, 2001). Estimates for all oceanic strata were summed, as survey effort was not uniformly distributed, to calculate a total estimate for the entire northern Gulf of Mexico oceanic waters (Figure 1; Mullin and Fulling 2004). Due to limited survey effort in any given year, survey effort was pooled across all years to develop an average abundance estimate.

The estimate of abundance for striped dolphins in oceanic waters, pooled from 1996 to 2001, is 6,505 (CV=0.43) (Mullin and Fulling 2004), which is the best available abundance estimate for this species in the northern Gulf of Mexico.

### Minimum Population Estimate

The minimum population estimate is the lower limit of the two-tailed 60% confidence interval of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate. This is equivalent to the 20th percentile of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate as specified by Wade and Angliss (1997). The best estimate of abundance for striped dolphins is 6,505 (CV=0.43). The minimum population estimate for the northern Gulf of Mexico is 4,599 striped dolphins.

### Current Population Trend

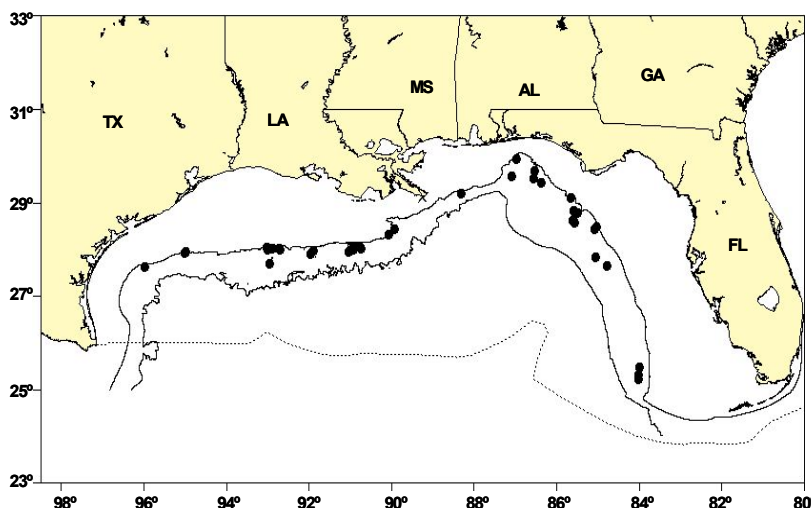


Figure 1. Distribution of striped dolphin sightings from SEFSC spring vessel surveys during 1996-2001. All the on-effort sightings are shown, though not all were used to estimate abundance. Solid lines indicate the 100m and 1,000m isobaths and the dotted line indicates the offshore extent of the U.S. EEZ.



There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The pooled abundance estimate for 1996-2001 of 6,505 (CV=0.43) and that for 1991-1994 of 4,858 (CV=0.44) are not significantly different ( $P>0.05$ ), but due to the precision of the estimates, the power to detect a difference is low.

#### **CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES**

Current and maximum net productivity rates are unknown for this stock. For purposes of this assessment, the maximum net productivity rate was assumed to be 0.04. This value is based on theoretical modeling showing that cetacean populations may not grow at rates much greater than 4% given the constraints of their reproductive history (Barlow *et al.* 1995).

#### **POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL**

Potential biological removal level (PBR) is the product of the minimum population size, one half the maximum net productivity rate and a recovery factor (MMPA Sec. 3.16 U.S.C. 1362; Wade and Angliss 1997). The minimum population size is 4,599 (CV=0.43). The maximum productivity rate is 0.04, the default value for cetaceans. The “recovery” factor, which accounts for endangered, depleted, threatened stocks, or stocks of unknown status relative to optimum sustainable population (OSP), is assumed to be 0.5 because the stock is of unknown status. PBR for the northern Gulf of Mexico striped dolphin is 46.

#### **ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY**

There has been no reported fishing-related mortality of striped dolphins during 1998-2003 (Yeung 1999; Yeung 2001; Garrison 2003; Garrison and Richards 2004).

#### **Fisheries Information**

The level of past or current, direct, human-caused mortality of striped dolphins in the northern Gulf of Mexico is unknown. Pelagic swordfish, tunas and billfish are the targets of the longline fishery operating in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. There were no reports of mortality or serious injury to striped dolphins by this fishery.

#### **Other Mortality**

There was 1 reported stranding of a striped dolphin in the Gulf of Mexico during 1999-2003. There was no evidence of human interaction for this stranded animal. Stranding data probably underestimate the extent of fishery-related mortality and serious injury because not all of the marine mammals which die or are seriously injured in fishery interactions wash ashore, not all that wash ashore are discovered, reported or investigated, nor will all of those that do wash ashore necessarily show signs of entanglement or other fishery interaction. Finally, the level of technical expertise among stranding network personnel varies widely as does the ability to recognize signs of fishery interactions.

#### **STATUS OF STOCK**

The status of striped dolphins in the northern Gulf of Mexico, relative to OSP, is unknown. The species is not listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The total fishery-related mortality and serious injury for this stock is unknown, but assumed to be less than 10% of the calculated PBR and can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. This is not a strategic stock because average annual fishery-related mortality and serious injury does not exceed PBR.

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